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THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME

A COMEDY FOR PHILANTHROPISTS

BY ST. JOHN HANKIN

LONDON
MARTIN SECKER PUBLISHER
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THE PERSONS OF THE COMEDY

LADY DENISON

MARGERY (*her daughter*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH (*Lady Denison's Sister-in-law*)

MRS. HORROCKS

MISS TRIGGS

GENERAL BONSOR

MR. FIRKET

HUGH VERREKER

BASIL HYLTON

SOAMES (*Lady Denison's butler*)

WILLIAM (*Lady Denison's footman*)

ANSON (*Lady Denison's maid*)

The action of the play passes at Priors Ashton, Lady Denison's house in the country, Acts I, II, and III in the Drawing-room, Act IV. in the Dining-room. A week passes between Acts I and II. One hour between Acts II and III, and a week between Acts III and IV.

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Cast of the Original Production at the Court Theatre, London, October 23rd, 1906:—

Lady Denison	Miss Florence Haydon
Margery	Miss May Martyn
Mrs. Eversleigh	Miss Margaret Murray
Mrs. Horrocks	Miss Lizzie Henderson
Miss Triggs	Miss Agnes Thomas
General Bonsor	Mr. Dennis Eadie
Mr. Firket ...	Mr. Edmund Gwenn
Hugh Verreker	Mr. Ben Webster
Basil Hylton	Mr. Berte Thomas
Soames	Mr. Eugene Mayeur
William	Mr. Norman Page
Anson	Miss Gertrude Henriques

The Play produced by Mr. H. Granville Barker

THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME.

ACT I.

SCENE :—*The drawing-room at Priors Ashton,* LADY DENISON'S *house in the country, a handsome room in the Adam style. On the right are double doors leading from the hall. Similar doors on the left lead to* LADY DENISON'S *own sitting-room. At the back of the stage are French windows, one on each side of the fireplace. These give on to a terrace, of which the low brick boundary wall, ornamented at intervals by stone balls on squat brick piers, is seen through the windows. Beyond the terrace the garden stretches away into the distance. Beyond that the open country, bathed in the sunshine of a hot September afternoon. The French window on the left of the fireplace is closed, but that on the right stands wide open.*

When the curtain rises the stage is empty. Then LADY DENISON *is seen to pass the French window on the left, followed by her daughter* MARGERY. *A moment later they enter by the window on the right.* LADY DENISON *is a kindly, comfortable lady of about forty-eight.* MARGERY *is a very pretty girl of twenty-two.*

LADY DENISON :

I don't think I'll go out again, Margery. The sun is rather hot, and it tires my eyes. *You* go if you like.

MARGERY :

I'd rather stay with you, mother. The others will get on quite well without me for a little. Where will you sit?

LADY DENISON :

Here I think. (*settling herself into an armchair with a sigh of contentment*) I do hope they're enjoying themselves. Do you think they are?

MARGERY
(*nods*) :

I think so.

LADY DENISON :

That's right. (*looking round vaguely*) I wonder where I put my work?

MARGERY :

Here it is. Shall I bring it? (*brings two wicker work-baskets from side table*)

LADY DENISON :

Thank you, dear. I knew I'd left it somewhere. I wish this strip was finished. I'm getting so tired of it. (*gets out long strip of woollen crochet of a brilliant red hue*)

MARGERY :

Poor mother! It'll soon be done now.

LADY DENISON
(*beginning to crochet*) :

How are *yours* getting on?

MARGERY

(*who has begun on a blue strip of equal brilliancy*):
Nearly finished. This is my last.

LADY DENISON

(*sighs*):

I've still two more to do.

MARGERY:

I'll do one of them for you, mother.

LADY DENISON:

No, dear. I shall manage. But next time I shall give *blankets*.

MARGERY:

But that wouldn't be the same as *making* something, would it?

LADY DENISON:

That's why I should prefer it.

MARGERY:

Lazy!

LADY DENISON:

I'm so glad Mr. Hylton is coming down. He'll help us to entertain all these people.

MARGERY:

Yes. Isn't it lucky he and Miss Triggs and Aunt Emily could all come by the same train! The carriage will only have to go to the station once.

LADY DENISON:

I do hope Miss Triggs will *like* being here.

MARGERY
(*cheerfully*):

I think she will. Poor thing, her lodgings looked dreadfully poor and uncomfortable when I went to see her. Here at least she'll have proper meals and feel she's among friends.

LADY DENISON:

Where have you put her?

MARGERY:

In the little room next mine. It's rather small, but the house is so full just now. I wanted to put her next Aunt Emily. But Aunt Emily always insists on having that room for her maid.

LADY DENISON:

How long do you think she'll stay?

MARGERY:

Two or three weeks I hope. Long enough to give her a thorough rest and change.

(*Further conversation is interrupted by the entrance of* WILLIAM, *the footman. His face wears an expression of portentous gravity.*)

WILLIAM:

Can I speak to you, my lady?

LADY DENISON:

Certainly. What is it, William? (*puts down crochet*)

WILLIAM
(*hesitating*):

If you please, my lady . . . I should like to give notice.

MARGERY
(*astonished*):

Give notice, William?

WILLIAM:

Yes, miss.

LADY DENISON:

Why *now*, William?

WILLIAM:

I'm very sorry, my lady, to have to give notice at all . . . after being with your ladyship so many years——

LADY DENISON:

Yes, yes. But why give notice *now?* The proper time to give notice is surely ten o'clock in the morning when I am seeing the housekeeper?

WILLIAM:

Very good, my lady. (*turns to leave the room*)

MARGERY:

Stop, William. (WILLIAM *stops and faces round*) Why do you *want* to give notice? You've always been a good servant. Have you found another situation?

WILLIAM :

No, miss. And I don't *want* to give notice. I hope you won't think that, miss.

LADY DENISON
(*plaintively*) :

Then why *do* it, William?

WILLIAM
(*hesitating*) :

Well, my lady. . . . It's on account of Soames. (*hesitates again*)

MARGERY :

Soames?

WILLIAM :

Yes, miss. As long as Wilkins was here things were better. Not but what we had our quarrels in the servants' hall even then. On account of *Thomas* you remember, miss?

MARGERY :

I remember.

WILLIAM :

But with Soames it's different, miss. Soames and I——

LADY DENISON
(*interrupting*) :

Have you spoken to the housekeeper?

WILLIAM :

Yes, my lady. But Mrs. Meredith says *she* can do nothing. Soames is that violent and his language quite awful when spoken to. So she said I had better come to you, my lady.

LADY DENISON

(*plaintive again*) :

How very annoying of Mrs. Meredith.

MARGERY

(*rather shocked*) :

Has Soames been using bad language to *you*, William?

WILLIAM :

Yes, miss. Not that I mind *that*. But there's other things . . . and in fact him and me don't hit it off. So perhaps I'd better leave at the month, my lady.

MARGERY :

Nonsense, William. Why, you've been with us ever since you were a boy.

WILLIAM :

Yes, miss. And never thought to leave her ladyship so long as *she* was satisfied.

MARGERY :

Very well. Mother is perfectly satisfied, and you must stay. And you must try and be patient with Soames. He *has* rather a bad temper with other servants, I know, but I'm sure he tries to conquer it. And *you* must help him. Will you?

WILLIAM
(*doubtfully*):

Very well, miss.

MARGERY
(*brightly*):

That's right. And then you'll see things will go better. Things always go better if only one tries to *help* people, don't they?

WILLIAM
(*still more doubtfully*):

Yes, miss.

LADY DENISON:

And I'll speak to Soames to-morrow morning.

WILLIAM:

Thank you, my lady. Thank you, miss. (*turns to go again*)

LADY DENISON:

And will you please send Anson to me, William?

WILLIAM:

Yes, my lady.

(WILLIAM *goes out.* LADY DENISON *resumes her crochet with a sigh.*)

LADY DENISON:

How troublesome servants are! I did think after *Thomas* went we should have no more quarrelling. And now it's Soames.

MARGERY :

Well, of course, we didn't engage Thomas because he was a *good* servant, did we? And it's the same with Soames.

LADY DENISON :

I suppose so. But it certainly makes helping people more difficult if they won't exercise a little self-control.

MARGERY
(*with unanswerable logic*) :

If they had more self-control they wouldn't *need* help, would they, mother dear?

LADY DENISON :

I wonder if it would be a good thing to ask Mr. Hylton to speak to Soames?

MARGERY
(*enthusiastic*) :

Oh, yes, I'm sure it would. Mr. Hylton has such a wonderful influence with people.

LADY DENISON :

Very well. I'll ask him this evening—if I remember.

(*Enter* ANSON, LADY DENISON'S *maid.* ANSON *is a young person of attractive appearance, but just now looks rather ill and rather frightened.*)

ANSON :

You sent for me, my lady?

LADY DENISON:

Yes, Anson. I want you to look at the mantle I wore this morning. The trimming has come unstitched.

ANSON
(*relieved*):

Is that all, my lady?

LADY DENISON:

Yes. I meant to tell you about it before luncheon. I thought I would speak about it now while I remember.

ANSON:

Very good, my lady. (*turns to go.* MARGERY *stops her*)

MARGERY
(*kindly*):

Is anything the matter, Anson? You don't look well.

ANSON:

Nothing, thank you, miss.

MARGERY:

Would you like to see the doctor? We can easily send for him.

ANSON
(*alarmed*):

Oh, no, miss.

MARGERY:

You're quite sure?

ANSON :

Quite, thank you, miss. I'd *much* rather not have the doctor. (ANSON *goes out*)

MARGERY :

I'm afraid something must be the matter with Anson. She's looked wretched lately. And she used to be so bright.

LADY DENISON
(*placidly*) :

I dare say she's only bilious.
(*At this point* MRS. HORROCKS *comes in from the terrace, followed by* MR. HUGH VERREKER. MRS. HORROCKS *is a thick-set, red-faced, pompous woman of no breeding.* VERREKER *is a handsome, rather devil-may-care young man of nine-and-twenty.*)

MARGERY
(*looking round, with a smile*) :
Are you coming in, Mr. Verreker?

VERREKER :

Yes. It's cooler here than on the terrace.

LADY DENISON :

Margery, give Mrs. Horrocks a cushion. (MRS. HORROCKS *sinks massively on to a sofa, where* MARGERY *proceeds to make her comfortable*) I hope you've had a pleasant afternoon?

MRS. HORROCKS :

Quite, thank you.

VERREKER
(*taking a seat by* MARGERY):

Mrs. Horrocks has had no end of a good time. She's been telling me the entire history of the Horrocks family from its remotest past. It appears the first of the Horrockses was a historian in the reign of Theodoric. His name was Orosius. Orosius . . . Horrocks, you perceive. Transliteration by Grimm's law.

LADY DENISON
(*who never recognises sarcasm even when she can see it*):

How very interesting.

VERREKER
(*blandly*):

It was!

MARGERY:

Have you left General Bonsor in the garden?

VERREKER:

No. He's just coming. He wants his tea. *He's* enjoyed himself too, by the way. He's been telling Mr. Firket a story about India for the last two hours. Poor Firket! And it's going on still.

(*Which indeed appears to be the case, for the loud voice of* GENERAL BONSOR *at this moment comes booming in from the terrace in the midst of one of his interminable stories. He and* FIRKET *are seen to pass the French window on the left, and then enter by that on the right.* GENERAL BONSOR *is a lean,*

liverish Anglo-Indian, of sixty-five or so, with a sparse, grizzled moustache. MR. FIRKET *is a pallid, deprecating little man in spectacles, whose neat black clothes look rather pathetically seedy.*)

GENERAL BONSOR :

So I said to Fennesey—Fennesey was our senior major. Thorough sportsman he was! Shoot a tiger as soon as look at him! Got killed afterwards out in the Sunderbunds. Tiger ate him. Very sad. However—I said to Fennesey—" Fennesey, my boy, if you don't keep that dash'd Khansamah of yours in order," I said, " you'll poison the whole cantonment." Fennesey laughed at that like anything. You should have seen how he did *laugh!* (GENERAL BONSOR *laughs immoderately*) So when the judge and I and Travers were dining with him a week or two later.(*turning sharply on* FIRKET, *whose attention is clearly wandering*) I told you about Travers, didn't I?

MR. FIRKET

(*pulling himself together with an effort*) :

Eh? No, I think not.

GENERAL BONSOR :

Ah, I must. Or you won't understand the story. Travers was in the Guides. He married—let me see, whom *did* he marry? I shall remember in a moment. (*pauses, cudgelling his brain*)

LADY DENISON :

Won't you sit down, Mr. Firket? You look quite tired.

MR. FIRKET
(*faintly*):

Thank you. (*sinks on to chair as far as possible from the* GENERAL. *The* GENERAL, *however, pursues him relentlessly*)

GENERAL BONSOR:

Blake . . Blake . . Blakesley! *That* was the name! She was a daughter of old Tom Blakesley of the Police. But I never knew him. He was on the Bombay side. Travers died afterwards of enteric at Bundlecund, I think, or was it Chittagong? Yes, it was Chittagong, I remember, because I had a touch of fever there myself a year or two later. Well, to go back to Fennesey——

MARGERY
(*coming to the rescue*):

Can you spare Mr. Firket to me for a little, General? I want him to wind some wool for mother.

GENERAL BONSOR:

Eh? Oh, certainly, certainly.
(*The* GENERAL *turns away pettishly, much annoyed at being interrupted in his story, which, he is convinced, was reaching its most enthralling moment.* MR. FIRKET *breathes a sigh of relief.*)

MARGERY:

Do you mind, Mr. Firket? You did the last for her so well?

MR. FIRKET:

Not at all, Miss Denison. On the contrary!

VERREKER

(*to* MARGERY, *under his breath*) :

I call that real tact!

MARGERY :

Hush!

(MR. FIRKET *is set to wind red wool, which he does contentedly till tea comes in. The* GENERAL *moons about sulkily for a minute or two, and then takes a seat on the sofa by* MRS. HORROCKS, *who makes room for him with marked unwillingness.*)

MRS. HORROCKS

(*to* LADY DENISON) :

What a lot of work you do, Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON :

Yes. This is a crochet counterpane for old Mrs. Buckley. It's very ugly, isn't it? (*holds it up disparagingly*) Margery and I each have to do eight strips. Then we fasten them together, like this. (*puts red and blue strip side by side, in which position the effect they produce is simply paralysing*) Mrs. Buckley's eighty-three next week, and almost blind. That's why Margery chose such bright colours. So that she might be able to *see* them, you know. Aren't they *detestable?*

MARGERY :

There's my last finished. (*holds up strip in triumph*) *Sure* you wouldn't like me to do one of yours, mother?

LADY DENISON :

No, thanks, dear. If I stopped doing this I should only have to begin on Mrs. Jackson's stockings. I'll do my share.

MARGERY :

All right. Then I can get on with something else. (*gets handkerchief-case out of basket*)

VERREKER
(*remonstrating*) :

I say, you're not going to begin another thing straight off?

MARGERY :

Not *begin?* This is half done. It's a handkerchief-case.

VERREKER :

Is it for yourself?

MARGERY :

No. It's for Mr. Hylton.

VERREKER :

The man who's coming down this afternoon?

MARGERY :

Yes. Those are his initials. (*shows them*)

VERREKER :

B. H.?

MARGERY :

Yes; his name's Basil. It's a pretty name, isn't it? (*starts working on them*)

VERREKER :

Why are you working him a handkerchief-case?

MARGERY :

I thought he'd like one.

VERREKER :

Well, *I'd* like a handkerchief-case. Why don't you work one for me?

MARGERY :

Perhaps you don't deserve one?

VERREKER :

I don't. But you said this morning when one did things for people one oughtn't to think of what they deserve but what they want.

MARGERY :

And *you* said, " What rot."

VERREKER :

Well, I've changed my mind. I think you're quite right. And I want a handkerchief-case. *My* initials are H. V.

MARGERY :

Isn't that rather a sudden conversion?

VERREKER :

It's none the worse for that. Besides, now I come to think of it, I do deserve one. (*dropping his voice*) I played billiards with old Firket this morning—to please *you*.

MARGERY
(*working steadily*):

To please *him*.

VERREKER:

It didn't. I made a hundred while he made eight. He simply hated it. Old Firket's a perfect ass at billiards—though he says he can give me thirty per cent. off any kind of billiard-table that's made.

MARGERY:

Still, it was nice of you to play with him.

VERREKER:

It was. I shan't do it again. And I think I ought to have a handkerchief-case for doing it at all.

MARGERY:

Very well. You shall have the next.

VERREKER:

Not the next. This one.

MARGERY:

No, no. This is Mr. Hylton's. It's the first time he's been to stay with us. He works very hard while he's in London, and scarcely ever gives himself a holiday. So I promised if he'd come and spend a fortnight with us this summer I'd work him something. This is it.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*looking at his watch testily*):

I thought you had tea at *five*, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON:

So we do, General. Is it five yet?

GENERAL BONSOR:

Twelve minutes past. Twelve and a-half.

LADY DENISON:

I'm so sorry. I suppose they're waiting for the others. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Eversleigh, comes to-day. And Mr. Hylton. And Miss Triggs. You've met my sister-in-law, I think?

GENERAL BONSOR:

Yes. Met her in Madrid when Eversleigh was at the Embassy there. I was at Gibraltar.

LADY DENISON:

He's at Vienna now. I wish he wasn't. It's such a long way off. We see simply nothing of them.

GENERAL BONSOR:

Not in London this season?

LADY DENISON:

No. And my brother can't get away even now. So Emily is coming by herself. I do hope she's not going to be late.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*unappeased*):

She *is* late. But everybody's late nowadays. It's the fashion. And a doosid bad fashion, too. When I was at Alleghur in '76——

LADY DENISON :

I don't think it's her fault. Perhaps the train——

GENERAL BONSOR :

Just so! Her train's late, of course. *That's* the English railway system all over. The trains run anyhow, simply anyhow. Why, when *I* was at Alleghur——

LADY DENISON
(*interrupting him desperately in the hope of staving off a story—which for the moment she successfully does*) :

It may not be the train, General. Perhaps one of the horses. . . . However, I really don't think we'll wait any longer. Will you ring, Mr. Verreker? (VERREKER *does so*)

MR. FIRKET
(*persuasively*) :

You ought to have a motor, Lady Denison. Much more reliable than horses. I can get you twenty per cent. off any pattern you like to choose if you think of it.

LADY DENISON :

Thank you very much, Mr. Firket. But I'm old-fashioned. I think I shall stick to horses.

MR. FIRKET :

Well, if you *should* change your mind, just apply to me, that's all.

LADY DENISON :

I won't forget. (*enter* SOAMES) Bring tea, Soames. We won't wait for Mrs. Eversleigh.

SOAMES :

Very good, my lady. (SOAMES *goes out*)

GENERAL BONSOR
(*clears his throat*) :

As I was saying, when I was at Alleghur——

MR. FIRKET
(*insinuatingly, to* LADY DENISON) :

I might make it five-and-twenty per cent. with some makers——

GENERAL BONSOR
(*sternly*) :

As I was saying . . . *as* I was saying . . . (*a hush falls*) When I was at Alleghur in '76 . . . (*annoyed*) There now, I've forgotten what I *was* going to say! . . . (*consoling them*) But it'll come back to me. . . . Ever at Alleghur, Verreker, when you were in India?

VERREKER :

For a few months.

MRS. HORROCKS
(*trying to head off the* GENERAL) :

What was your regiment, Mr. Verreker?

VERREKER :

Beastly place I thought it.

MRS. HORROCKS
(*louder*) :

What *was* your regiment, Mr. Verreker?

VERREKER :

I beg your pardon, Mrs. Horrocks. The Munsters.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*delighted*) :

Then you knew Toby Nicholson! He commands the Munsters, doesn't he?

VERREKER
(*hesitates*) :

Yes.

GENERAL BONSOR :

Why, *I* know Toby. First-rate chap! Knew him when he was a subaltern. I must write to the old beggar. Where are the Munsters now?

VERREKER
(*who seems bored with the subject*) :

Shorncliffe, I believe.

(*The sun begins to set in a glory of crimson, but is quite unable to stop the* GENERAL. *Nobody notices it, in fact, until the red glow attracts* MARGERY'S *attention a few minutes later.*)

GENERAL BONSOR :

Good! I'll write to-night, by Jove. I'd like to hear from Toby again. I've not seen him since we were at Poonah together. (*triumphantly*) *That* reminds me of what I was going to tell you! . . . When I was at Alleghur in '76 we had a train from Goomti that was timed to arrive at Alleghur at 6.38. Just in time to change before dinner, don't you know.

Well, that train was *always* late, *always*, by Jove! So I said to Macpherson . . . he was superintendent of the Alleghur-Goomti line. Good chap Mac. Very good judge of a horse. Died of cholera, I remember, in '81—or was it '82? . . . Anyhow, I said to him, "Mac, my boy, I'll race your dashed little train from the Boondi Bridge to the station—that's the last three miles into Alleghur—with my pony and trap for a hundred rupees.

(*During this speech* SOAMES *and* WILLIAM *have brought in tea. A certain hostility is just visible between them, but very discreetly shown. They put the tea on the table by* LADY DENISON, *and go out.* MARGERY *goes to the table, sits down, and begins to pour out. Her questions about cream and sugar, and* LADY DENISON'S *hospitable offers of tea-cake, sadly interrupt the thread of the* GENERAL'S *story, but he struggles on defiantly.*)

MARGERY:

Does everyone take cream?

MRS. HORROCKS:

Milk for me, please. And *one* lump of sugar.

VERREKER:

Two lumps for me.

GENERAL BONSOR:

. . . Well, old Mac wasn't at all pleased at that. He was awfully proud of his little one-horse line. It was opened in '72, I remember. Pat Ellis was traffic manager. Ellis had been——

MARGERY:

Will you give that to Mrs. Horrocks, Mr. Verreker? And this to mother?

GENERAL BONSOR:

Ellis had been——

LADY DENISON:

You'll find some tea-cake under that cover, Mrs. Horrocks.

GENERAL BONSOR:

As I was saying——

MRS. HORROCKS:

Thank you.

GENERAL BONSOR:

As I was saying! . . . (*glares, silence falls*) . . . Ellis had been on the Bengal-Nagpore line before he came to Goomti. He was a son of old General Ellis, who was killed in the first Sikh war. He married——

VERREKER
(*bringing cup*):

Your tea, General.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*irritably*):

In a moment. In a moment. . . . He married Nellie Tremayne, daughter of Tremayne of the 63rd. Tremayne had four daughters, I remember——

LADY DENISON
(*loud whisper*):

Will you cut that cake, Mr. Verreker, and see if anybody would like some?

(VERREKER *does so, with elaborate precautions as to silence.* GENERAL BONSOR *meantime goes on steadily with his story in his loud, authoritative voice, and enjoys himself thoroughly.*)

GENERAL BONSOR:

Kitty, the eldest, married Molyneux, who was afterwards commissioner at Ranigunj. One of his sons was gazetted the other day to the Shropshires. Another went into the navy. Maud, the second girl, married Monty Robertson. He was a gunner. They lived in a little house outside Alleghur just where the road forks. One way leads to Balaghai, the other leads to . . . tut, tut, what's the name of that place the Alleghur road goes to, Verreker?

VERREKER
(*who is handing tea-cake*):

I don't know. Alleghur, I suppose.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*annoyed*):

No! no! Kupri! *That's* the name. Kupri! There was one more daughter, but I don't remember what became of her. . . . No, there were only three of them, I recollect. It was *Ainslie* who had four daughters. The Four Graces we used to call them—because there were four of them.

LADY DENISON
(*still whispering*):

Some more tea, Mr. Firket? (*but* MR. FIRKET *murmurs "No" with infinite precaution, and puts down cup.*)

GENERAL BONSOR:

. . . Ainslie was Superintendent of Police, and afterwards went to Central India. But I was going to tell you about that race. Well, I took the trap——

SOAMES
(*announcing*):

Mrs. Eversleigh, Miss Triggs, Mr. Hylton. (SOAMES, *having shown in the new arrivals in the order named, goes out.* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *is a prosperous, well-dressed, rather hard-looking woman of forty-five,* MISS TRIGGS *a lean, angular lady of thirty-four, with thin lips tightly compressed, clothed in meagre, tight-fitting black garments.* HYLTON *is a handsome man of forty. A good face, but not in the least solemn or ascetic. Clothes quite human and unclerical.*)

LADY DENISON
(*rising*):

Dear Emily, how are you? (*kisses her*) The General's story was so interesting I never heard the carriage. You know General Bonsor, don't you? (GENERAL BONSOR *and* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *shake hands*) How do you do, Miss Triggs? How do you do, Mr. Hylton? (*shakes hands with them*)

MARGERY:

How do you do, Aunt Emily? (*kisses her*) I hope you've not had a tiring journey, Miss Triggs? (*shakes hands with her and* HYLTON, *bestowing a smile of welcome on the latter*)

LADY DENISON:

I must introduce you all. Mrs. Horrocks, this is my sister-in-law, Mrs. Eversleigh. (*bow*) Miss Triggs, Mr. Hylton: General Bonsor, Mr. Firket, Mr. Verreker. (*confused bowing from everybody*)

MARGERY:

And now you'll all have some tea. You must be dying for it. Do you know you're dreadfully late?

GENERAL BONSOR:

I was just saying before you came in, Mrs. Eversleigh, the English railways are the most unpunctual in the world.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*frigidly*):

Indeed? I believe our train was *before* its time. But one of the horses got a stone in its shoe or something, and Hollings took about half an hour getting it out.

MR. FIRKET
(*triumphantly*):

What did I tell you, Lady Denison. You'd much better have a motor. (LADY DENISON *shakes her head smilingly*)

MARGERY:

Your tea, Aunt Emily. (*takes it to her*) Cream and sugar, Miss Triggs?

MISS TRIGGS
(*crisply*):

No tea for me, thank you. I never drink tea unless it is *quite* fresh made.

MARGERY
(*cheerfully*):

Then I'll order some fresh for you. Mr. Verreker, will you ring?

MISS TRIGGS:

Pray don't trouble. I can do *quite* well without any tea.

MARGERY:

It's no trouble. (VERREKER *rings*) Bread-and-butter, Aunt Emily? (MRS. EVERSLEIGH *takes some*)

LADY DENISON:

You look dreadfully overworked as usual, Mr. Hylton. You must have a complete rest while you're down here. (*to* MISS TRIGGS) Mr. Hylton works a great deal among the poor in London.

MISS TRIGGS:

Indeed? (*to* HYLTON, *sweetly*) Do you find that does any good?

HYLTON
(*smiling*):

I hope so. . . .

MISS TRIGGS :

What *kind* of work do you do?

HYLTON :

Oh, preaching and writing and so on.

MISS TRIGGS
(*interested*) :

Preaching? Are you a clergyman?

MARGERY :

Mr. Hylton is the Founder of the Church of Humanity.

MISS TRIGGS
(*disappointed*) :

Oh. Not a *real* clergyman.

(*There is a general gasp from everyone at this remark, except from* MISS TRIGGS *herself, who seems quite unconscious of having said anything outrageous. Luckily, before she can commit herself further,* SOAMES *enters. He carries a tea-pot on a salver.*)

MARGERY :

Some fresh tea, Soames.

SOAMES :

Yes, miss. (*puts new tea-pot in place of old one, which he takes away. He goes out*)

MARGERY
(*hospitably*) :

Now you can have your tea, Miss Triggs. (*gives cup to her and takes* MRS. EVERSLEIGH'S)

MRS. HORROCKS:

Where *is* the Church of Humanity, Mr. Hylton? I don't think I've ever been in it.

HYLTON

(*quite simply*):

The Church of Humanity is everywhere.

MRS. HORROCKS:

But the *Church*, the building?

HYLTON:

We have no building so far. I preach in halls and different places about London, which we hire.

MISS TRIGGS:

I don't call that being *everywhere*. I call that being *nowhere*.

HYLTON

(*quite good-tempered*):

In one sense, of course.

MARGERY

(*more to cover up* MISS TRIGGS'S *second lapse than from a desire to feed* MRS. EVERSLEIGH):

Give that to Aunt Emily, Mr. Verreker.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH

(*to* VERREKER, *who brings her back her cup*):

Are you one of the Norfolk Verrekers? I met Sir Montague in London two seasons ago.

VERREKER:

He's my uncle.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

I remember he was very full of some experiments he was making . . . with turnips. To combat agricultural depression, I think.

VERREKER :

I daresay. Uncle Montague's always muddling round with that kind of thing.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

It doesn't interest you apparently.

VERREKER :

Not in the least. But it amuses him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

Is he working at it still?

VERREKER
(*carelessly*) :

Probably. I've not seen him for the last four years.

MARGERY
(*noticing the red glow of the setting sun which now fills the room, and turning to look through the window*) :

What a lovely sunset! Come, all of you. (*going on to terrace*) We *must* go out and see it. Mrs. Horrocks, General, Aunt Emily. Come.

LADY DENISON :

Margery! Emily hasn't finished her tea yet. Nor has Miss Triggs.

MISS TRIGGS
(*rising*):

Thank you. I have quite done.

MARGERY
(*who is standing just outside the French window*):

Come to the end of the terrace. You can't see it properly from here. Be quick, or it'll be gone. Come along.

(*All the visitors troop off after* MARGERY *except* MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *They are seen to pass the window on the left before they disappear.* LADY DENISON *remains to entertain her sister.*)

LADY DENISON:

How did you leave Edward, Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Very well, I think. He's had a lot of work to do lately, and that always seems to suit him. How have *you* been?

LADY DENISON:

Quite well, thanks.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Who are all these dreadful people you've got down here?

LADY DENISON
(*protesting*):

Not *dreadful*, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Aren't they? I can hardly imagine a more dreadful visitor than General Bonsor. He's the greatest

bore in London. Edward says he's nearly emptied three of the Service Clubs. I thought people had given up inviting him.

LADY DENISON
(*placidly*):

That's why we asked him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*puzzled*):

I beg your pardon?

LADY DENISON:

That's why we asked him. You see, he's getting an old man, and it seemed so unkind that nobody would have him to their houses. Of course, his stories *are* rather long. But I suppose he can't make them any shorter. So Margery thought if we asked him down for ten days he might enjoy it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I think it very unlikely *we* shall enjoy it. (*rises and puts down cup*)

LADY DENISON:

Would you mind ringing while you're up, Emily? Then Soames can take away.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*does so*):

Who's that Miss Triggs?

LADY DENISON:

She's a governess. She teaches German.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Is she going to teach you?

LADY DENISON
(*emphatically*):

Oh, *no*, Emily. Margery did suggest it. But I refused. Miss Triggs is only here as a visitor.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I see. (*returns to her seat*)

LADY DENISON:

Margery met her at the Hammonds'. She taught Cecily for a few weeks—till they could get someone else. She's very poor, I'm afraid, and doesn't get many pupils. So Margery thought it would be kind to ask her to stay. (*enter* SOAMES) You can take away, Soames. And turn on the lights.

SOAMES:

Yes, my lady. (SOAMES *turns on the electric lights and removes the tea things.* LADY DENISON *resumes her interrupted crochet*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Are all your visitors invited on this penitential system?

LADY DENISON:

Except you, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Except me, of course. That Mr. Firker, for instance?

LADY DENISON
(*correcting her*):

Firket. He's something in the City. I'm not sure what. But nothing very prosperous, I'm afraid. He used to be a stockbroker, but he failed. And now he sells things on commission. I believe that's what it's called. He's always wanting to sell me a new billiard table or a bicycle or a sewing machine. To-day it was a motor car. I shall have to buy something from him before he leaves, I know.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Where do you pick up these extraordinary people?

LADY DENISON
(*quite simply*):

Margery found Mr. Firket. On the Underground Railway.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Where?

LADY DENISON:

At South Kensington, I think. But it may have been Sloane Square. It was in a first-class carriage, and Mr. Firket only had a third-class ticket. An inspector came round and wanted to take him up. So Margery paid his fare, and then, of course, they became friends.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Naturally!

LADY DENISON:

He's been with us nearly a week. He goes on Monday.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I'm glad to hear it.

LADY DENISON:

Mrs. Horrocks we met in a hotel at Mentone. The other people at the hotel would hardly speak to her. They were quite rude about it. Which seemed very unkind, as she is only dull and rather vulgar. And she can't *help* that, can she? So Margery said we must be *nice* to her. And later on, when we were arranging whom to have down, we thought *she* should be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Surely this is rather a new departure of yours, Muriel? You were always perfectly ridiculous about what you call being kind to people. But it never used to be as bad as this.

LADY DENISON:

It's Mr. Hylton's idea. He calls it beginning one's charity at home. He wants everyone to do it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

How curious. He *looks* sane enough.

LADY DENISON:

Of course he's sane, Emily. Mr. Hylton is a very clever man. He writes *books*.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

But why does Mr. Hylton think you should fill your house with wild beasts in this way? Is it for the good of *their* souls or of yours?

LADY DENISON

(*quite impervious to her sister's sarcasm*):

Both, I think. It was in a sermon he preached—on the true hospitality and the false. It was a beautiful sermon.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Which is this?

LADY DENISON:

The *true*, of course. *False* hospitality is inviting people because you like them. *True* hospitality is inviting them because they'd like to be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Ah! . . . I wish you'd thought of mentioning in your letter that you were practising true hospitality just now. Then I wouldn't have come.

LADY DENISON:

Now you're being worldly, Emily. And when people are worldly it always makes me drop my stitches. (*does so*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Why was Mr. Verreker asked, by the way? I suppose there's something shady about him as *he's* here?

LADY DENISON:

I don't think so. Margery met him at a dance at the Fitz Allen's. His parents are both dead and he's quarrelled with his uncle, and altogether seems rather alone in the world. So Margery thought he was *quite* a person to be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Why did he quarrel with his uncle?

LADY DENISON:

About his leaving the army, I think.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Why did he leave the army?

LADY DENISON:

I don't know, Emily, I never asked. (MRS. EVERSLEIGH *shrugs her shoulders impatiently*) That's all we've got at present.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

And quite enough, too. I hope they're all properly grateful?

LADY DENISON
(*astonished that her sister should not have grasped this*):

They don't *know*. Of course, we shouldn't *dream* of telling them. It would spoil all their pleasure. They think they're asked here because we *like* them. If they didn't they wouldn't enjoy it half so much. People do so love to feel they're *wanted*.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

It must be an unusual sensation with the General! (*the sneer passes unregarded by* LADY DENISON, *who has dropped another stitch*) How long has Mr. Hylton been preaching in this absurd way?

LADY DENISON:

He has been working among the poor for years, I believe. But it was only this season that people one knew began to go to him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Does he make converts?

LADY DENISON:

I suppose so. His services were crowded.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Indeed? I must remember to take Edward when we are next in London. Edward always enjoys a new religion.

LADY DENISON:

Won't you talk to Mr. Hylton while he's down here?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I shall make a point of doing so. London is changing very much, Muriel. Twenty years ago everyone in society went to Church—or, at least, pretended to do so. Nowadays people seem to go anywhere!

(MARGERY *returns from her sunset, followed by* MRS. HORROCKS *and* MISS TRIGGS. *The glow has faded from the sky, and twilight is falling.*)

MARGERY:

It's been *such* a lovely sunset, Aunt Emily. You *were* lazy not to come out.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Your mother and I have been talking.

MARGERY:

Can Mrs. Horrocks write a letter in your room, mother? The General's in the library with Mr. Firket, and that's rather disturbing.

LADY DENISON:

Certainly. Will you turn on the lights, Margery? You'll find note-paper and things on my table, Mrs. Horrocks.

MRS. HORROCKS
(*graciously*):

Thank you so much, Lady Denison.

(MARGERY *turns on the switch by the door of* LADY DENISON'S *room on the left.* MRS. HORROCKS *goes in.* MARGERY *closes the door after her, and turns to* MISS TRIGGS.)

MARGERY:

Now I can show you your room, Miss Triggs, if you will come upstairs.

LADY DENISON:

I'm afraid we have had to give you a *very* small room, Miss Triggs. But the house is so full just now.

MISS TRIGGS
(*sweetly*):

Pray don't apologise, Lady Denison. Of course, I know persons who are compelled to support themselves by *teaching* cannot expect to be treated with *ceremony! Anything* will do for *me.*

LADY DENISON:

I assure you——

MISS TRIGGS:

Not at all. I *quite* understand.

LADY DENISON:

But really, Miss Triggs——

MISS TRIGGS
(*firmly*):

Please do not trouble to say any more. It is quite unnecessary. Shall we go, Miss Denison? (*stalks out, followed by* MARGERY)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

What an intolerable woman!

LADY DENISON:

I do think she might have let me explain.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Explain! I should have packed her out of the house if I'd been in your place.

LADY DENISON:

I don't think Mr. Hylton would approve of *that.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Then Mr. Hylton should do his own entertaining. Why doesn't he have Miss Triggs to stay with *him?*

LADY DENISON:

Emily! Mr. Hylton is a bachelor.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I suppose so. People with absurd theories about life usually *are* bachelors. But I don't think Miss Triggs would have come to any harm. She's excessively plain.

LADY DENISON
(*shocked*):

Really, Emily, what dreadful things you say. I don't think living in Vienna can be at all good for you.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*ignoring this rebuke*):

What I can't understand is why, if you *must* be kind to people—which seems to me quite unnecessary—you shouldn't choose agreeable people instead of disagreeable ones.

LADY DENISON
(*worried*):

I'm afraid I can't make it any clearer. But Mr. Hylton will tell you. (HYLTON *is seen to pass the window on the left*) Here he is. (*He enters by the other window*) Mr. Hylton, will you kindly explain to Mrs. Eversleigh why I have to be kind to disagreeable people? I never can remember, and Margery isn't here.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*with dangerous sweetness*):

My sister-in-law has been telling me about your peculiar doctrines, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON

(*quite sincere and matter-of-fact*):

You see, Mrs. Eversleigh, agreeable people don't need friends to be kind to them. They have plenty already. Disagreeable people have not.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH

(*briskly*):

If people are disagreeable they don't deserve kindness.

HYLTON

(*smiling*):

It's not what people *deserve* but what they *want* that matters, don't you think? In fact, often the less people deserve the more we ought to help them. They need it more.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I'm afraid that's hardly a view you can expect me to take seriously, Mr. Hylton. It's very *modern* and original, but it's not *serious*.

HYLTON

(*gently*):

I should hardly have called it *modern*. Usen't we to be taught that it was our duty to love our enemies?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Yes. But only on Sundays. And no one ever *dreamed* of doing it. So, of course, that didn't matter. You want Lady Denison to *do* it.

HYLTON
(*more gravely*):

I certainly think the world would be a happier place and a better place if people helped each other because they needed help irrespective of whether they deserved it or not.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

That is certainly a convenient doctrine for your friend Miss Triggs.

HYLTON
(*smiling again*):

What has my friend Miss Triggs been about? I never met her till this afternoon, by the way.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Still, it's on *your* principles that she was invited. And her manners are insufferable.

HYLTON:

A little brusque perhaps. But I dare say it's only shyness. She has never been here before, has she, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON:

No.

HYLTON:

And lots of people are shy in a strange house, aren't they?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Her shyness certainly takes a singularly unpleasant form.

HYLTON
(*cheerfully*):

Well, we must just set to work to be kind to her and make her enjoy her visit, and in a week or two she'll be a different woman. It's wonderful how a little kindness and goodwill softens people. Will you try?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*laughing*):

No, no, Mr. Hylton, *I'm* not going to join the Church of Humanity, not even to change Miss Triggs. Though I'm sure *any* change would be for the better.

HYLTON

(*quite good-tempered*):

We shall convert you yet, you'll see.
(MARGERY *returns from looking after* MISS TRIGGS.)

LADY DENISON:

Is Miss Triggs better satisfied with her room now, Margery?

MARGERY:

Yes, I think so. . . . I've put her into mine.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

What!

MARGERY:

That's why I've been so long. I had to empty some of the drawers for her and move the bed.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Really, Margery!

MARGERY
(*puzzled*):

What is it, Aunt Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

To turn out of your own bedroom merely to please an ill-tempered German governess! I never heard of such a thing.

MARGERY
(*who apparently has not considered the subject till now*):

Poor Miss Triggs. I suppose she *has* rather a curious temper. But I dare say she can't help it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Nonsense! She's a thoroughly ill-conditioned person.

MARGERY
(*mildly*):

Well, Aunt Emily, there's no use being *angry* with her about it, is there? We must just be nice to her and try and make her stay pleasant, and then I dare say she'll be better.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*sarcastically*):

So Mr. Hylton was good enough to suggest.

MARGERY
(*throwing a bright smile to* HYLTON):

Then it's sure to be right. Mr. Hylton always knows how to manage people.

HYLTON
(*rising*):

After that handsome compliment I think I'd better go upstairs. I have a letter or two to write before post—if it's not gone, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON:

No. The box isn't cleared till a quarter past seven. Where have you put Mr. Hylton, Margery?

MARGERY:

In the Blue Room, mother. If you'll come, Mr. Hylton, I'll show you where it is.

HYLTON:

Thank you.

(MARGERY *goes out to show* HYLTON *his room.* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *looks after them thoughtfully for a moment. Then she turns to her sister and speaks.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*meaningly*):

Margery seems to have a great admiration for your Mr. Hylton, Muriel.

LADY DENISON
(*quite unconscious of what her sister is thinking of*):

Yes. She thinks a great deal of him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Um. . . . Is he staying here long?

LADY DENISON:

For a fortnight, I hope.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Is that *wise?*

LADY DENISON:

What do you mean, Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

It would be so tiresome if there were to be any foolish entanglement between him and Margery. Girls are so romantic about clergymen. And Mr. Hylton is a *sort* of clergyman, isn't he? Couldn't you send Margery away somewhere while he's here?

LADY DENISON
(*still not seeing the point*):

But I don't want to send Margery away. How am I to entertain Miss Triggs and Mrs. Horrocks without Margery?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Nonsense, Muriel. Do please understand that Margery's future is of more importance than entertaining Miss Triggs. If Mr. Hylton were in orders it would be different. Edward might get someone to give him a living—though livings aren't what they were, of course. He might even become a bishop in time. Or at least a dean. But as he's only some kind of dissenter there's no use thinking of that. And if he were to propose to Margery while he was down here it might give us a great deal of trouble.

LADY DENISON
(*surprised*):

But is Mr. Hylton going to propose to Margery? I've heard nothing about it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

And won't—till it's too late. That kind of man has no proper feeling about these things. And, of course, he hasn't a sixpence.

LADY DENISON :

Hasn't he, Emily? I thought he was quite well off.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

What!

LADY DENISON
(*placidly*) :

I thought he had quite a large income. Only he gives it all away. At least, that was what Lady Wrexham told me. His place is close to theirs in Shropshire. But it's let just now.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*on whom a light seems to dawn*) :

My dear Muriel, why on earth didn't you say so before?

LADY DENISON :

I didn't think you wanted to know about Mr. Hylton's income.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*refusing to believe that her sister's obtuseness is anything but assumed*) :

Not want to know? Of course I want to know. It makes *all* the difference. If Mr. Hylton is a rich man and has a place in Shropshire it explains everything.

LADY DENISON
(*puzzled*):

Explains what?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*impatiently*):

Your asking him here. And turning your house into a bear garden because he tells you to. Of course, it flatters him. And it does no harm—for once. It's not as if you need know these people afterwards.

LADY DENISON
(*shocked*):

Emily!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*ignoring this interruption*):

I wonder what his income really is? I must find out from Lady Wrexham. It'll be a great thing to have Margery properly settled. I was always afraid you might have some difficulty in finding a really suitable husband for her. She's so very *good*. And men don't like that. It frightens them. Yes, dear, you've done quite right, and I think you've been very clever about it. I didn't know you had it in you! (LADY DENISON *gazes at her sister in hopeless bewilderment—and the curtain falls*)

ACT II.

SCENE:—LADY DENISON'S *drawing-room, as in the previous act. Time, about half-past eleven in the morning. A week has elapsed since the events of the last act. All* LADY DENISON'S *visitors are still with her save* MR. FIRKET, *who has returned to*

his obscure occupation in the City. When the curtain rises, LADY DENISON *is discovered immersed in a German grammar, from which she is endeavouring to master the intricacies of the first declension.*

LADY DENISON:

Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, *O* Bruder. (*looking up from book*) Der Bruder, Des Bruder, Den Bruder. . . . No, that's wrong. (*consults book again*) Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, *O* Bruder! What a language!

(LADY DENISON *reads through the declension once more, with still greater emphasis on the "O," which she seems to find a relief for her feelings. She then puts down her book on her lap, and is about to try if she can repeat it correctly from memory, when she is interrupted by the entrance of her sister-in-law, carrying a half-finished letter.* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *is not in the best of tempers.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Here you are, Muriel. I was just going to your room to find you.

LADY DENISON:

Miss Triggs is in there writing letters. (*murmurs softly*) Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder——

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Can you find a corner for me, too? When General Bonsor and Mrs. Horrocks are in the library together I feel like Daniel in the den of lions. It's impossible to write letters under those conditions.

LADY DENISON
(*plaintively*):

How tiresome! I hoped they would get on better after that scene in the drawing-room last night.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I'm sure I don't know why. If you ask impossible people to stay they may be civil to *you*, but they're perfectly certain to quarrel with each other. Mr. Hylton doesn't seem to have thought of that. (*seats herself at writing table*)

LADY DENISON:

What are they quarrelling about *now?* Was it about the Peerage again?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Yes. Mrs. Horrocks—who really is the most vulgar person I have ever met—was explaining to Mr. Verreker that she could always tell whether a person was well-born or not the moment she set eyes on him. Good blood always told. Of course, this was meant for the General, whose father was a tailor in Regent Street, as everybody knows. The General took up the challenge at once, and growled out that good birth was all rubbish, and good blood came from eating good butcher's meat, not from being fifth cousin to a Baronet. The reference was to Sir James Horrocks, who is Mrs. Horrocks's second cousin twice removed, as she's never tired of telling us. At that Mrs. Horrocks flushed crimson, and said the General was no gentleman—and then I came away.

LADY DENISON:

Didn't Mr. Verreker manage to soothe them?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

He didn't try. He seemed rather to enjoy the carnage.

LADY DENISON
(*much depressed*):

I wonder if *I* ought to go? It'll interrupt my German dreadfully.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Your German?

LADY DENISON:

Yes. I've had to learn German after all—to please Miss Triggs. She was getting restless at having nothing to do, and yesterday she said she really must be thinking of getting back to her work. Which was absurd, of course, as no one wants to learn German in September. However, Margery said we ought to find her a pupil, just to keep her amused. So she's to teach me. (*sighs*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Why doesn't Margery learn?

LADY DENISON
(*peevishly*):

Margery knows German already. Girls seem to know everything nowadays. (*murmurs*) Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder——

(*But* LADY DENISON *seems fated never to get beyond the dative case of her declension this morning, for at this moment* MRS. HORROCKS *bursts into the room. She is purple in the face with indignation.*)

MRS. HORROCKS:

Lady Denison! I really must ask you to request General Bonsor to moderate his language. I have never been treated with such disrespect in any house before.

LADY DENISON
(*meekly*):

I'm so sorry, Mrs. Horrocks. What has the General been saying?

MRS. HORROCKS:

I couldn't possibly repeat it. But he has entirely forgotten the courtesy that is due to a *lady*, as I told him!

LADY DENISON
(*deprecating*):

Was that wise? I should have thought it would only make the General worse.

MRS. HORROCKS:

It *did!* He became so violent that I felt obliged to leave the room at once. General Bonsor ought to understand that this is not a barrack yard.

LADY DENISON
(*trying to soothe her*):

You must make allowances, Mrs. Horrocks. The General's temper *is* violent at times, but I don't think he can help it.

MRS. HORROCKS:

He *ought* to help it.

LADY DENISON:

Still, he's an old man. And he's been in India. And when people have done that we must make allowances for them—on account of the climate. I hear it's so trying. (*insinuatingly*) And we all have failings of *some* kind, haven't we?

MRS. HORROCKS
(*stiffly*):

I am not aware that *I* have failings.

LADY DENISON

(*accepting the correction with a meekness at which* MRS. EVERSLEIGH'S *blood boils*):

Well. All the rest of us. Perhaps if you went back to him now you would find him a little cooler?

MRS. HORROCKS:

I shall certainly not do anything so rash. If I go out on to the terrace do you think I shall be safe from his intrusion?

LADY DENISON

(*slighted to get rid of her on any terms*):

Perhaps that would be best. You'll find chairs out there. (MRS. HORROCKS *stalks out on to the terrace.* LADY DENISON *turns to her sister, who has been endeavouring to go on with her letter*) I wonder how the General is now. Do you think I ought to send Margery to him?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*looking up sharply*):

Certainly not. Leave him to Mr. Verreker.

LADY DENISON
(*doubtfully*):

Mr. Verreker isn't always very successful with the General. He never seems to take him seriously. And the General hates that. But Margery can always manage him. (*rising*) Do you know where she is?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*irritably*):

With Mr. Hylton, let's hope. Do leave *her* in peace.

LADY DENISON
(*sitting down again resignedly*):

Very well, Emily. . . . Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, O—— (MARGERY *and* VERREKER *enter from garden*) Margery, will you please go to the library and see after the General? He's been quarrelling with Mrs. Horrocks.

VERREKER:

The General's not in the library now. We passed him a moment ago crossing the lawn.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*severely*):

I thought *you* were with Mr. Hylton, Margery?

MARGERY

(*quite unconscious of the heinousness of this conduct*):

Mr. Hylton's correcting proofs. I've been to the kitchen garden—with Mr. Verreker—to order the vegetables for luncheon.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*tartly*):

I hardly think Mr. Verreker can have been of much assistance.

VERREKER
(*blandly*):

On the contrary, I was invaluable. I prevented Miss Denison from ordering peas and substituted beans. It's too late for peas. Besides, I prefer beans. And I insisted on peaches. The gardener hesitated, but I was firm.

LADY DENISON
(*persuasively*):

Would you mind being quite quiet all of you for the next ten minutes? Or I shall never know this declension in time for Miss Triggs. *You* might go back to the library, Emily, as the General has gone?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*rising*):

Well, perhaps I shall be less disturbed there. (*takes up unfinished letter*) And you'd better go to the school-room and practise, Margery. You'll forget your music altogether if you aren't careful.

MARGERY:

Very well, Aunt Emily.

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH *returns to the library.* LADY DENISON *returns to her German grammar.* MARGERY *and* VERREKER *converse in confidential undertones. The effort is well meant, but if they talked at the top of their voices it could hardly interfere with her progress more.*)

LADY DENISON
(*murmurs*):

Die Schwester, Der Schwester, Der Schwester, Die Schwester, *O* Schwester. (*aloud*) You won't mind my going on with my German, will you, Mr. Verreker? I really *must* get it done.

VERREKER
(*heartily*):

Not a bit. I *like* seeing other people work.

MARGERY
(*laughing*):

Then you can stay and watch mother while I go and practise.

VERREKER:

I'll come and watch *you*.

MARGERY
(*shaking her head*):

Oh, no. I never allow anyone to be with me when I practise. On account of the wrong notes.

VERREKER:

Well, don't practise then. Stay down here and talk.

MARGERY:

And waste half the morning! Certainly not!

VERREKER:

You needn't. You can work—at my handerchief-case. You're taking an awful time over it.

MARGERY:

What a shame! Why, I only began it two days ago, and it's half finished.

VERREKER:

Is it? Let me see.

MARGERY
(*takes it out of basket*):

Look!

VERREKER:

I say, it *is* getting on.

MARGERY
(*looks at it contentedly*):

Yes. There are the initials. H. V. Aren't they nice and sprawly?

VERREKER:

I say, it's really awfully nice of you to work it for me, Miss Denison.

MARGERY
(*threading a needle*):

But I like working things for people.

VERREKER:

Not for everybody, though?

MARGERY:

Oh, yes, if they want them. I'm making a whole lot of things for the Willises' bazaar at Christmas.

VERREKER
(*disgusted*):

I hope you don't class me with a beastly bazaar?

MARGERY:

It'll be a very nice bazaar. It's to pay off the debt on the Parish-room.

(*There is silence for a minute or two.* MARGERY *works away steadily at the handkerchief-case.* VERREKER *looks at her wonderingly.*)

VERREKER
(*genuinely curious*):

Miss Denison, don't you ever do *anything* to please yourself?

MARGERY:

Of course I do. Lots of things.

VERREKER:

Do you? I wish I could catch you at it.

MARGERY
(*puzzled*):

What do you mean?

VERREKER:

Why, you seem to me to spend your whole time looking after other people. All the morning you run round doing things for your mother.

MARGERY:

I'm not "running round" now, am I?

VERREKER:

No. Because you're making *me* a handkerchief-case. In the afternoon, if I ask you to come for a walk, you insist on taking Miss Triggs or that ridiculous old General, because it "wouldn't be kind

not to ask them." I think that's the phrase? In the evening you play bezique to amuse Mrs. Horrocks. Don't you *occasionally* do something to amuse yourself?

MARGERY
(*quite simply*):

I don't know. I've never thought about it.

VERREKER:

That's just it! You've never thought about it! Well, I think it's not right. Nobody ought to be as unselfish as all that. It shows up the rest of us too much.

MARGERY
(*laughing*):

How absurd you are.

VERREKER:

I'm not absurd. Quite the contrary. (*leaning back lazily in his chair as he makes this profession of faith*) I like everyone to give his mind to getting a good time for himself in this wicked world. Then I know where I am. Of course, I don't mind his doing someone else a good turn now and then. But he oughtn't to over-do it. You *over-do* it.

MISS TRIGGS
(*opening the door on the right and poking her head out of* LADY DENISON'S *room archly*):

I'm ready for you now, Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON:

Very well. (*rising dismally*) I shall be in my room with Miss Triggs, Margery, if anyone wants me.

MARGERY :

All right, mother.

LADY DENISON :

Der apfel, Des apfels, Dem apfel, Den apfel, *O* apfel. (*repeats this to herself in a last desperate effort to imprint it on her memory as she disappears through the door on the right to join* MISS TRIGGS. *There is a pause.* MARGERY *has been thinking over* VERREKER'S *last remark gravely. She now takes him to task with charming seriousness*)

MARGERY :

Mr. Verreker, why will you always pretend to be selfish and cynical? I'm sure you're not really.

VERREKER :

I don't know about cynical, but I'm unquestionably selfish. I have no illusions whatever about that.

MARGERY :

Then why don't you try to improve?

VERREKER :

I don't want to improve. I'm quite contented to be as I am.

MARGERY
(*rather shocked*) :

Nobody can be that! We all have ideals of *some* kind.

VERREKER
(*briskly*) :

Only for other people. And they're usually great nonsense. If people would only give up bothering about ideals and face facts, what a much happier world this would be for all of us.

MARGERY
(*earnestly*):

But that would be dreadful! Think what the world would lose! Think of all the saints and the martyrs who laid down their lives for ideals!

VERREKER
(*equally in earnest*):

And think what a lot of harm they did!

MARGERY
(*horrified*):

Mr. Verreker, you *can't mean* that! You must feel sometimes how splendid it would be to do something heroic, to lay down your life for a great cause, to make the world better.

VERREKER
(*laughing*):

I don't want to make the world better. I think the world's all right as it is.

MARGERY
(*astonished*):

But you can't *always* feel like that? There must be times when you feel that the world is full of suffering and injustice. That it's not all right, but all wrong.

VERREKER
(*refusing to be impressed*):

Oh, yes. When I'm not well, you mean?

MARGERY
(*hurt*):

No, I don't. Seriously.

VERREKER
(*thinks for a moment*):

Well, sometimes, perhaps—when I'm with *you*, for instance—I have a dim feeling that if we all put our backs into it we might improve things. But I struggle against it.

MARGERY
(*wondering*):

Why struggle against it—if you think it would make things better?

VERREKER:

Because people who try to improve the world have rather an uncomfortable time, Miss Denison. And I've a great dislike of being uncomfortable.

MARGERY:

Mr. Verreker!

VERREKER:

Now you're shocked. But that's inevitable, I suppose. If one only knows enough about people one always does disapprove of them.

(*At this point the conversation is interrupted by the*

entrance of HYLTON. MARGERY *welcomes him with a smile.* VERREKER, *I am afraid, does not.*)

MARGERY:

Have you finished your proofs, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON:

For this morning.

MARGERY:

Then will you come here and bring Mr. Verreker to a better frame of mind? His opinions are simply dreadful—if they *are* his opinions. You must convert him.

VERREKER
(*rising*):

No. If I'm to be converted—which I sincerely hope will not happen—I stipulate that it shall be by Miss Denison unaided. Two to one isn't fair. I shall go—unless Hylton does. (*takes out cigarette case*)

MARGERY:

You're running away!

VERREKER:

Yes—to smoke.

(VERREKER *strolls out on to the terrace and then out into the garden. There is silence for a moment or two. Then* MARGERY *speaks thoughtfully, putting down her work and gazing straight before her.*)

MARGERY:

What a curious man Mr. Verreker is.

HYLTON:

Is he?

MARGERY:

Yes. He looks at things so strangely. I've never met anyone like him before.

HYLTON:

In what way?

MARGERY:

In what he thinks about life—if he does think it. He says he's selfish and isn't at all ashamed of it. He says ideals do more harm than good. And that he thinks the world would get along much better if only people would leave it alone and not keep trying to improve it. Have *you* ever met anyone who thought like that?

HYLTON
(*lightly*):

Oh, yes. It's a phase many men pass through.

MARGERY
(*eagerly*):

But they do pass *through* it. They don't *stay* like that, I mean, do they?

HYLTON:

It depends. Some men seem as if they were born blind—like kittens. Soul-blind, I mean. They have no perception at all of the spiritual side of things. Then one day something opens the eyes of their soul, and for the first time they *see*.

MARGERY:

What kind of thing?

HYLTON:

Who can say? There are many ways in which a man's soul may be awakened. A word may do it sometimes—a line in a poem, a sentence in a book. Or perhaps, someone comes into his life, someone who is kind to him or loves him, and then the eyes of his soul are opened.

MARGERY
(*enthusiastic*):

How wonderful!

HYLTON
(*gravely*):

Yes. But terrible, too. For perhaps no one comes, or the person who might have helped them is careless or indifferent, and then they may remain blind always.

MARGERY
(*earnestly*):

But Mr. Verreker—and people like him—only need someone to come and open their eyes?

HYLTON:

Yes. Verreker's quite a good fellow, I expect, underneath. He'll turn out all right if only he falls into good hands.

MARGERY:

But if he falls into bad hands?

HYLTON
(*sadly*):

Then he may never make anything of his life. But it won't be because there was no good in him. Only because no one came to bring it out.

MARGERY
(*thoughtfully*):

I see.

HYLTON
(*the optimist in him coming to the surface again*):

It's astonishing what a lot of good there is in every man if only you look deep enough for it. Men seem selfish and heartless and indifferent on the surface and all the while there's a soul in every one of them! I could give you hundreds of instances from my work among the very poor, cases of people who seemed hopelessly brutish and degraded doing kind things and generous things that would seem incredible if they were not true.

MARGERY
(*kindling at his enthusiasm*):

How splendid! But that was *you*, Mr. Hylton. You've such a wonderful influence with people. *You* must make Mr. Verreker *see*.

HYLTON
(*smiling*):

He didn't seem very anxious to listen to *me*, Miss Denison. You must try what *you* can do.

(*Enter* ANSON. *She looks pale, and her eyes are suspiciously red. She draws back nervously on seeing who is in the room.*)

ANSON
(*hesitating*):

I beg pardon, miss. I thought I might find her ladyship here.

MARGERY
(*looking up, surprised*):

Mother is in her room, Anson. But I think she's busy just now. Can *I* do anything?

ANSON:

No, thank you, miss. I wanted to speak to her ladyship. (*going*)

MARGERY:

You can see if she's engaged if you like.

ANSON:

Thank you, miss. (*crosses rapidly to the door of* LADY DENISON'S *room and opens it*) Can I speak to you, my lady?

LADY DENISON
(*off*):

Yes. Come in Anson. What is it?

(ANSON *disappears into* LADY DENISON'S *room, closing the door after her.*)

MARGERY
(*turning to* HYLTON *with a smile*):

Poor mother. I expect she was delighted to be interrupted. I know *I* always was when *I* was learning German.

HYLTON:

Is that your mother's maid? She looks as if she were in trouble of some kind. Is anything the matter?

MARGERY:

I don't know. She's not looked herself for some time. I asked her about it a week ago. I wanted her to see the doctor. But she wouldn't.

HYLTON:

Has she been with you long?

MARGERY:

Four years. I daresay it's nothing serious. Servants are so silly about what they eat. And then they wonder why they aren't well. Or she may have had some quarrel with one of the other servants. Do you find *your* servants quarrel among themselves, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON:

No. You see I only keep one.

MARGERY:

I sometimes wish *we* did! Only last week William actually gave mother notice just because he couldn't get on with one of the others. But mother told you about that, didn't she?

HYLTON:

No.

MARGERY:

She meant to. I suppose she forgot.

(*Re-enter* ANSON, *crying bitterly, followed by* LADY DENISON, *much flustered.*)

LADY DENISON:

There! There! Anson. *Do* try and control yourself. There's no use going on like that. Margery, will you go and find Aunt Emily for me? She's in the library, I think. I want her advice about something. And don't come back, dear, for a little.

MARGERY:

Very well, mother.

(MARGERY *goes to find* MRS. EVERSLEIGH, *after a puzzled glance at her mother and* ANSON.)

HYLTON
(*rising*):

Perhaps I'd better? . . .

LADY DENISON
(*fussily*):

No, no! Please stay, Mr. Hylton. I shall want *your* advice, too.

HYLTON:

Of course, if I can be of any use . . . (*re-seats himself.* LADY DENISON *sits also. A silence, broken only by the snufflings of poor* ANSON)

LADY DENISON
(*half irritable, half plaintive*):

You'd better sit down, Anson. And would you *please* not snuffle like that if you can possibly help

it. It *can't* do any good, and the sound is most distressing.

ANSON:

Very well, my lady. (*tries unsuccessfully to subdue her sobs*)

LADY DENISON

(*her nerves all on edge*):

I do wish Emily would come. Surely Margery ought to have found her by this time. MRS. EVERSLEIGH *enters*) Ah! here she is. (*breaking out*) Emily, a dreadful thing has happened! I thought you would advise me. (*hesitates*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH

(*testily*):

Well, Muriel. What is it?

LADY DENISON

(*with a miserable effort to pull herself together*):

Anson, my maid. (*wanders off again*) You remember Anson? She came to me from Lady Carberry.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Yes, yes. I know. Well?

LADY DENISON

(*shying frantically at the subject, and taking refuge in irrelevant detail*):

I was in my room, doing my German. Fortunately Miss Triggs had gone out into the garden for a few minutes while I was trying to learn the second

declension. When Anson came in. She was evidently upset about something, and looked ready to cry. In fact, she *did* cry. She's been crying ever since. (*fresh tears from* ANSON) Oh, *please* Anson, don't begin again. Or if you do, make as little noise as you can.

ANSON
(*sniffing dismally*):

Yes, my lady.

LADY DENISON
(*still struggling desperately to postpone the moment when she must come to the point*):

I asked her what was the matter, and she said she wanted to give notice. I was very much astonished, because Anson has been with me four years and has never given me notice before. So I asked her why. And then she said that she and Soames . . . well, in fact that Soames had——

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*interrupting*):

Muriel! If you are about to say what I suppose you are about to say, wouldn't it be better if Mr. Hylton——? (HYLTON *rises again*)

LADY DENISON
(*almost weeping*):

No, Emily. I asked Mr. Hylton particularly to remain. I shall want his advice about this. I shall want everybody's advice. Besides, it's partly his fault. For if it weren't for Mr. Hylton I should never have engaged Soames.

HYLTON
(*surprised*):

I didn't know——

LADY DENISON:

Oh, yes. Soames had a *very* bad character from his last place. In fact, no character at all—which is worse. He was with the Matthisons before he came to me, and Lady Frances gave the most dreadful accounts of him when Margery was staying with her. She said the champagne had disappeared in the most remarkable manner. And as for his *book*, no one could make head or tail of it. I'm not sure there wasn't something about the plate, too. Anyhow, she sent him away—without a character, as I said. And I always think that so hard for a servant. Don't you, Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

To have no character? Very.

LADY DENISON:

Well, of course, he couldn't get another place. And Lady Frances got a letter from him while Margery was there, saying he was almost destitute. So Margery thought he ought to be given another chance. Mr. Hylton is always saying people ought to be given another chance. Aren't you, Mr. Hylton? And as Lady Frances didn't seem willing to have him back and Wilkins was leaving me just then—on account of Thomas—I engaged him. I wish I hadn't now.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

And now Soames has——?

LADY DENISON:

Yes. (*lamentably*) And I think it's most wicked of him. Anson has always been a good girl, and her mother is a most respectable woman. However, she is willing to forgive Anson and have her home, I'm glad to say, so that will be all right. (*endeavouring to look on the bright side of things*) She has no father, fortunately. (*fresh sobs from* ANSON) Oh, Anson, not *again!*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH

(*impatiently*):

Hadn't you better send Anson to her room while we decide what is to be done? There's no use keeping her here if she can't control herself.

LADY DENISON

(*meekly*):

I thought perhaps you might want to ask her something about all this, Emily? Or Mr. Hylton?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

There's nothing to ask. She's told you her story. Now we must send for Soames and hear what *he* has to say. I suppose we must let him give us *his* version before you dismiss him.

LADY DENISON

(*much depressed at the prospect*):

I suppose so. But it's all very painful. Ring the bell, please, Anson, and then go away and cry somewhere else.

ANSON:

Yes, my lady.

(ANSON *rings the bell and then goes out, snuffling to the last. Pause.*)

HYLTON

(*breaking silence*):

I'm extremely sorry, Lady Denison, if anything I have said has caused all this trouble, either to you or that poor girl. I never dreamed such a thing could occur.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH

(*with bitter politeness*):

Really? Then you must be singularly lacking in imagination, Mr. Hylton. It seems to me the logical outcome of your theories—when applied to domestic service.

HYLTON

(*meekly*):

Of course, there's a danger. But all reforms have an element of danger in them.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH

(*triumphantly*):

Then why reform?

HYLTON:

But without reform all progress would be impossible. The world would simply stagnate. We *must* risk *something*.

LADY DENISON
dolorously):

Well, I'd so much rather not have risked Anson. She was such an excellent maid.

(*Enter* SOAMES. *For a full minute no one speaks. He looks inquiringly from one to the other, but his demeanour is perfectly respectful. Finally, as the silence is growing oppressive, he breaks it.*)

SOAMES:

Did you ring, my lady?

LADY DENISON
(*flustered*):

Yes. . . . What is this, Soames, that Anson tells me about you?

SOAMES
(*not a muscle of his face moves*):

What *has* she told you, my lady?

LADY DENISON:

That while we were in London three months ago, within a month of your coming to me in fact, you . . . And now she's expecting a baby in the Spring!

SOAMES
(*bows*):

That is so, my lady.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*exasperated at the unruffled composure of the man*):

Well! Have you nothing else to say?

SOAMES
(*after a moment, during which he seems to be considering the point*):

No, madam—except, of course, that I'm very sorry this should have occurred.

LADY DENISON
(*indignantly*):

Is that all?

SOAMES
(*after another moment's thought*):

I think that is all, my lady.

LADY DENISON:

Of course, you're prepared to make all the amends in your power to poor Anson?

SOAMES
(*bows*):

Of course, my lady.

LADY DENISON:

Very well, then. You must marry her.

SOAMES
(*respectfully*):

I'm afraid I can't do *that*, my lady.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

There, Mr. Hylton!

LADY DENISON
(*indignant again*):

Nonsense, Soames. You will be acting very wickedly if you do anything else. Anson is a good

girl. A very good girl. She is the best maid I ever had, and I'm very sorry to part with her. But you have brought this disgrace on her, poor thing, and you must certainly marry her.

SOAMES
(*still perfectly respectful*):

I beg pardon, my lady. I should be perfectly willing to marry Anson. She seems a very respectable young woman, as you say. Unfortunately, I am already married.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*scandalised*):

What!

SOAMES
(*turning to her*):

I have a wife already, madam—I am sorry to say.

LADY DENISON
(*helplessly*):

Really, this is most unlucky. Mr. Hylton, can *you* suggest anything?

HYLTON:

As things stand, I'm afraid there's nothing to suggest. We must do our best for this poor girl, of course (*more sternly*) and Soames must help us in any way he can. That's all that I can think of.

SOAMES
(*snubbing his interference with the most crushing politeness*):

Anything *Lady Denison* thinks right, sir, I shall be happy to fall in with.

LADY DENISON
(*weakly*):

Very well. That will do then, Soames.

SOAMES:

Thank you, my lady.

(SOAMES *bows and goes out, preserving his dignity to the last. Everybody seems to breathe more freely when his imposing presence is withdrawn.*)

LADY DENISON
(*mournfully*):

Poor Anson. I am really dreadfully sorry about her. It's such a terrible thing to happen to a girl.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

If any *other* of your converts are engaging their servants on philanthropic lines, Mr. Hylton, you had better caution them to choose single men.

LADY DENISON
(*cheered at this reflection*):

James, I'm glad to say, *is* unmarried.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

James?

LADY DENISON:

The boy who helps in the garden. But, then, he's only sixteen.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Tck! . . . (*pause*) Of course, Soames must be sent away.

LADY DENISON
(*sighs*):

I suppose so.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Even Mr. Hylton must see that.

HYLTON
(*thoughtfully*):

I'm not sure.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Not sure! After this disgraceful affair!

HYLTON:

I am thinking of the future, Mrs. Eversleigh, not of the past. I'm very sorry for what has happened to poor Anson, sorrier than I can say. But that can't be altered now. What is past is past. The question is how are we to help Soames?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*exasperated*):

But we don't *want* to help Soames. Soames has behaved abominably.

HYLTON
(*quietly*):

That's no reason for not helping him, is it?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*gasps*):

It certainly seems so to *me*.

HYLTON:

Surely not? Surely it's always our business to help anyone if we can, whatever he may have done. And in this case we *can* help Soames. If he's sent away now he may be absolutely ruined. You see, it's the second place he's had to leave without a character.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*acidly*):

Do I understand you to consider that in his favour, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON
(*mildly*):

No. But it gives him an added claim on our forbearance, doesn't it? Since it makes it more difficult for him to make a fresh start.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*with relentless logic*):

Then the more a servant disgraces himself the more we are bound to help him? And if he only does it often enough I suppose you'd pension him?

HYLTON
(*gravely*):

I would still try to help him, whatever he had done.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Rubbish!

LADY DENISON:

Hush, Emily!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I beg your pardon, Mr. Hylton, but really this is quite preposterous. It's trying to regulate one's life by a theory instead of by the light of common sense.

LADY DENISON

(*worried*):

It certainly is rather confusing, you must admit, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON

(*gently*):

I think my view is defensible even from the common-sense standpoint—though it's not a standpoint I set much store by. What I want—what we all want, don't we?—is to prevent Soames from sinking into destitution and so perhaps into crime.

LADY DENISON:

I don't want him to do *that*, of course.

HYLTON:

The only way to prevent it is to get him some employment. Unhappily, he is probably unfitted for anything but domestic service. The only thing to do, therefore, is to find him a place, and give him a chance of retrieving his character. I would willingly engage him myself if I could, but my establishment has no place for a highly-trained butler—or, indeed, for a man-servant at all. But if Lady Denison would keep him on——

LADY DENISON
(*protesting*):

Oh, no, I couldn't do that.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I should think not, indeed!

HYLTON
(*earnestly*):

It needn't be for long. Say a year. If at the end of that time his work and his conduct generally have been satisfactory, Lady Denison can then send him away with a character, and he'll be able to get another place.

LADY DENISON:

But I shan't want to send him away if his conduct is satisfactory.

HYLTON
(*persuasively*):

Then why not try the experiment? Of course, I'm now putting this on the lowest grounds, the common-sense grounds. Morally it needs no defence. One should always forgive wrong-doing, shouldn't one?

LADY DENISON:

I can't think *that*, Mr. Hylton! Wicked people *must* be punished. If they weren't it would be so discouraging for good people.

HYLTON:

Wicked people are only weak people, Lady Denison. If they were strong they would resist temptation. But they are weak, and they yield to it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*with decision*):

If Soames is unable to resist temptation of *this* kind, I think Muriel had certainly better discharge him, on account of the other maids.

HYLTON:

I don't think he'll offend in this way again. He's had a lesson.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

He had a lesson at the Matthisons'.

HYLTON:

And profited by it. He has been quite honest since he came to you, hasn't he, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON:

I believe so.

HYLTON
(*triumphantly*):

Very well, then. The experiment answered in that case.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*coming back resolutely to her old point*):

Oh, come, Mr. Hylton, we must be *practical.* Of course, this idea about being kind to unpleasant people and worthless people, and, in fact, to everybody one doesn't like and oughtn't to like, *sounds* very nice. But it's not *practical.*

HYLTON
(*giving* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *up in despair*):

Well, Lady Denison. It's for you to decide.

LADY DENISON
(*piteously*):

That's just it. I do so hate deciding things. If only I could ask Margery.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Certainly not.

HYLTON
(*earnestly*):

It may save a soul.

LADY DENISON:

Do you really think that? (HYLTON *nods*) How very annoying! However, if that's so, I suppose he must stay. (*sighs*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Muriel!

LADY DENISON
(*goaded*):

Well, Emily, what *can* I do? If Mr. Hylton thinks so.

HYLTON
(*with splendid optimism*):

I do think so. Thank you so much, Lady Denison. I'm sure you'll never regret it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I'm quite sure she will. And I think it's very wrong of you, Mr. Hylton, to make my sister-in-law behave in this way. She doesn't like it.

HYLTON:

You exaggerate my influence, Mrs. Eversleigh. It is Lady Denison's own goodness of heart that makes her want to help people. Without that I should be powerless.

LADY DENISON

(*breaking into a smile of content. If you stroke* LADY DENISON *she purrs at once*):

How nice of you to say that, Mr. Hylton! But you always say the right thing. I was really feeling dreadfully dispirited about all this, and you've driven it all away. There's nothing like *tact*, is there? (GENERAL BONSOR *wanders in from the garden humming a tune*) Is that you, General? Have you been in the garden with Mrs. Horrocks?

GENERAL BONSOR

(*with icy dignity*):

I have *not*, Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON

(*flurried*):

Oh, no, to be sure, I forgot. . . . I mean, I remember. . . . Just so.

GENERAL BONSOR

(*severely*):

I have been in the Rose-garden smoking a cigar.

LADY DENISON

(*nervously*):

That's so kind of you. It's so good for the roses.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*refusing to be propitiated*):

Where Mrs. Horrocks is I have no idea. (*opens the door and stalks out, head in air*)

LADY DENISON
(*much concerned*):

Dear me, why *did* I say that! Of course, I oughtn't even to have *mentioned* Mrs. Horrocks. But I'd forgotten all about their quarrel this morning. This affair of Soames quite put it out of my head. And now I suppose the General will be offended. Really, what with quarrels among one's visitors and scandal in the Servants' Hall, life is hardly worth living.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*blandly*):

Mr. Hylton's system!

HYLTON
(*rising*):

Shall I go and pacify the General?

LADY DENISON
(*clutching at a straw*):

If you would, Mr. Hylton. It really is scarcely safe to leave him alone just now, in case Mrs. Horrocks should come in. (HYLTON *nods, and goes out to soothe the* GENERAL. LADY DENISON *sighs*) It's been a very *tiring* morning, hasn't it, Emily?

(MISS TRIGGS *puts her head in from* LADY DENISON'S *room. She speaks with deadly politeness, the politeness of the boa-constrictor to the rabbit.*)

MISS TRIGGS :

I've been waiting for you nearly twenty minutes, Lady Denison. Is that declension ready now?

LADY DENISON
(*flurried again*) :

Oh, dear, I'm afraid not. I've really had no time to attend to it since you left me, Miss Triggs.

MISS TRIGGS
(*coming into the room, apparently unable to believe her ears*) :

No *time?*

LADY DENISON
(*volubly*) :

No. I'm *so* sorry. I was called away on urgent business. Most urgent business. And it's no good trying to do anything before luncheon now, is it? It will be ready in two or three minutes. (*an awful pause*)

MISS TRIGGS
(*words softer than butter, yet very swords*) :

I am afraid it is useless for me to attempt to teach you German, Lady Denison, if you are unwilling to give even the *small* amount of time I ask to studying it.

LADY DENISON
(*meekly*) :

But really, Miss Triggs——

MISS TRIGGS :

Apologies are unnecessary. I am accustomed to be treated in this way. It is the experience of all

women, I believe, who earn their living by education. (*turns towards door on the right*)

LADY DENISON:

I assure you——

MISS TRIGGS:

You need not. I *quite* understand. We will abandon our lesson until later in the day, when you may have leisure to apply yourself to it. (*sweeps out into the hall, hugging her grievance to the last*)

LADY DENISON
(*almost in tears*):

Now *she's* offended. Really, it's *too* bad!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Mr. Hylton's system!

LADY DENISON:

I'd no idea people who taught German were so sensitive. I ought never to have said I would learn it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*wrathfully*):

You ought never to have asked Miss Triggs here at all. Nor any of these people. Mrs. Horrocks, General Bonsor, Mr. Verreker. They're all impossible.

LADY DENISON
(*protesting feebly*):

I don't see what's the matter with Mr. Verreker. *He's* not been doing anything tiresome, has he?

(*But the gods are against* LADY DENISON, *for this*

is the precise moment selected by MARGERY *to rush into the room, breathless and happy, from the garden, with an announcement that almost turns her relatives to stone.)*

MARGERY:

Mother, dear, is that you? (*kisses her*) I've got *such* a piece of news for you. What do you think? Hugh and I are engaged to be married!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH

(*with an uneasy feeling that this is not* HYLTON'S *Christian name*):

Hugh?

MARGERY

(*turning to her*):

Mr. Verreker. (VERREKER *enters from the garden*) Here he is. (*to her mother again, speaking very rapidly and excitedly*) He asked me to marry him down by the lake, and I said I would. Aren't you *pleased!*

LADY DENISON

(*bewildered*):

Margery!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH

(*furious*):

Really!

(*What* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *would have said had time been given her to put her indignation into words will never be known, for at this moment the luncheon gong rings loudly, and* MARGERY, *who is blissfully unconscious that her news is not delighting everybody, makes for the door, chattering to the last.*)

MARGERY :

Oh, there's the luncheon gong, and my hands are simply piggy. We've been grubbing up ferns for my rockery. So are yours, Hugh. Run and wash them, dear. You must wait to be congratulated till afterwards.

VERREKER :

All right. (*goes out, with the shame-faced laugh of the newly-engaged man*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

I must say ! (*but words fail her*)

MARGERY :

I can't stop now, Aunt Emily, or we shall be late, and then the General will be furious.
(MARGERY *runs off into the hall gaily.* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *gasps with indignation. She turns on her sister fiercely.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

And *you* said Margery was going to marry Mr. Hylton ! Muriel, you must be a perfect fool.

LADY DENISON
(*stung by the injustice of this accusation*) :

I didn't, Emily. *You* said it !

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*impatiently*) :

Well, there's no use arguing about that now. You must put a stop to this engagement at once, without a moment's delay.

LADY DENISON:

Yes. (*with decision*) I shall speak to Margery about it directly after luncheon. It's very naughty of her. I shall certainly refuse to sanction the engagement.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Better speak to her at once.

LADY DENISON
(*weakly*):

I think I'll wait till after luncheon.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*vindictively*):

Mr. Hylton again! If it weren't for him Mr. Verreker would never have been invited to stay.

LADY DENISON
(*shaking her head sadly*):

Yes. I really must give up going to hear Mr. Hylton. The results are *too* unpleasant. I didn't mind asking the wrong people to the house and trying to make them happy. But I can't have them proposing to my daughter. I must make a stand against it all, now, at once, while I remember. (*rises and goes to bell*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*wondering what fresh folly her sister is going to commit*):

What are you going to do?

LADY DENISON:

Dismiss Soames!

(LADY DENISON *rings—and the curtain falls.*)

ACT III.

SCENE :—*Still the* DENISONS' *drawing-room. Time, an hour later. When the curtain rises the stage is empty.* LADY DENISON, MRS. EVERSLEIGH, MRS. HORROCKS, MISS TRIGGS, MARGERY, HYLTON, VERREKER, *and* GENERAL BONSOR *troop in from luncheon. The* GENERAL'S *voice is heard booming across the hall as he loses himself in another of his interminable stories, even before he actually reaches the room.*

GENERAL BONSOR :

. . . It was at Jubbulpore it happened. We were up there after Pig. Travers was there, I remember, and Hindley, of the 106th. (*entering*) No, not Hindley. He died the year before. Bellairs. First-rate chap Bellairs. In the police. I'll tell you a story about *him* some day. He married Molly Henderson, daughter of old Henderson, the judge. Fat Henderson we used to call him because he was so stout. Well, as I was saying, Travers and I were *alone* together——

VERREKER
(*to* MARGERY) :

Poor Travers!

GENERAL BONSOR
(*wheeling round*) :

What, sir!

VERREKER :

Nothing.

GENERAL BONSOR :

Did I hear you remark, *Poor* Travers?

VERREKER :

I hope not, General. You were not intended to.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*scorning this evasion*) :

Did you remark it, sir?

LADY DENISON
(*nervously*) :

I think you must have misunderstood Mr. Verreker, General.

MRS. HORROCKS
(*in loud, grating tones, not looking at the* GENERAL, *but seeming to address the company at large*) :

And, anyhow, the subject is scarcely worth pursuing, is it? Unless we are to be kept listening to this story the *whole* afternoon.

GENERAL BONSOR :

I had not intended to detain Mrs. Horrocks. (*glares*)

MARGERY
(*coming to the rescue*) :

Don't you think we'd better all go out for a walk while the sunshine lasts? It's a pity not to make the most of it.

LADY DENISON
(*who has been waiting in vain for a moment to speak to her daughter*) :

Margery.

MARGERY:

Yes, mother. In a moment. Mrs. Horrocks, you'll come, won't you?

MRS. HORROCKS:

Thank you. I shall be delighted.

MARGERY:

Miss Triggs? (MISS TRIGGS *bows graciously*) General?

GENERAL BONSOR
(*decidedly, having noted that* MRS. HORROCKS *is to be of the party*):

No, thank ye.

MARGERY:

Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON:

I'm afraid I must stay at home and finish my proofs.

LADY DENISON:

Margery, I want to speak to you before—What is it? (*this to* WILLIAM, *who has entered a moment before with letters on a salver*)

WILLIAM:

The post, my lady. (LADY DENISON *takes her letters*) And could Mrs. Meredith speak to you for a moment?

LADY DENISON
(*harassed*):

Oh, very well.

(LADY DENISON *looks for a moment towards her daughter, but, finding her still absorbed in the*

duty of peace-making, gives up the attempt to speak to her in despair and goes out. MARGERY *is quite unconscious of her mother's agitation, as she sat too far from her at luncheon to notice that she was not in her usual spirits, and, moreover, when you are practising True Hospitality, depression at the luncheon table is not sufficiently uncommon to excite remark.*)

MARGERY :

That makes three. Who else?

WILLIAM
(*to* GENERAL BONSOR) :

A letter for you, sir.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*taking it*) :

Thank ye. (WILLIAM *goes out*) Excuse me. (*opens it and begins to read*)

MARGERY :

Will you come, Aunt Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

No, thanks. I am going to drive with your mother.

MARGERY :

Very well. Hugh, four. That'll be all.

VERREKER
(*chaffing her*) :

You don't ask whether *I* want to come.

MARGERY
(*with mock severity*):

You've got to come whether you like it or not. As a penance.

VERREKER:

All right—if it's clearly understood that it's a penance. I'd rather like a walk.

MARGERY:

Let's all go and get ready then. Come, Mrs. Horrocks. Meet in the hall in five minutes.

(*All go out save* HYLTON, *the* GENERAL, *and* MRS. EVERSLEIGH. MRS. EVERSLEIGH *picks up a book which she is in the middle of,* HYLTON *glances through an article in the "Fortnightly." The* GENERAL *is reading his letter.*)

HYLTON:

This article in the *Fortnightly* on Farm Colonies is worth reading, Mrs. Eversleigh.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*declining the suggestion firmly*):

Thank you. I've had *quite* enough philanthropy lately without that. (*returns to her book*)

GENERAL BONSOR
(*with an emphasis which makes* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *positively jump*):

Well! ! !

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*irritably*):

Really, General Bonsor, these sudden exclamations are most disconcerting. Is anything the matter?

GENERAL BONSOR
(*too full of his subject even to notice the rebuke*):

Mrs. Eversleigh, *is* Lady Denison aware of the character of that young man?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*bored*):

Of Mr. Hylton?

GENERAL BONSOR:

No! No! Of that young man who has just left the room. What's his name? Verreker.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*interested at once*):

I don't know. You'd better ask her.

GENERAL BONSOR:

I shall certainly do so. I venture to think she is *not* aware of it. I venture to think that when she has read what my old friend, Nicholson, Toby Nicholson, says about him (*taps letter fiercely*) she will scarcely consider him a fit person to invite to meet *me!*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*with elaborate irony*):

I shouldn't build on *that* if I were you. My sister-in-law has peculiar views about hospitality.

(*But the irony is completely wasted on the* GENERAL, *as he is not in the secrets of the* HYLTONIAN *system of philanthropy.*)

GENERAL BONSOR:

Can you tell me where I shall find her?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

She'll be back in a moment, I believe. She only went to speak to the housekeeper. Here she is.

(*And, in fact,* LADY DENISON *re-enters at this moment, but her interview with the housekeeper seems to have been of a depressing kind, for she looks more woe-begone than ever.*)

GENERAL BONSOR
(*breaking out*):

Lady Denison——

LADY DENISON
(*to* MRS. EVERSLEIGH, *fussily*):

Emily, the *cook* wants to leave now. She has found out about Anson, and says she can't remain with me after the month. I told her Soames was leaving, but she said . . . (*suddenly becoming conscious that* GENERAL BONSOR *is in the room, and is burning to speak to her*) I beg your pardon, General. I thought Emily was alone.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*with icy distinctness*):

General Bonsor has some news to communicate to you about Mr. Verreker. I needn't say of an unfavourable character.

LADY DENISON:

Emily! (*collapses*)

HYLTON
(*rising*):

Perhaps I'd better——

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*grimly*):

On the contrary. Mr. Hylton had better remain. It's all *his* doing, as usual.

HYLTON
(*puzzled*):

Mine?

LADY DENISON
(*almost distracted with anxiety*):

Never mind that now, Emily. But, General, if you *have* anything unpleasant to say, *will* you say it as quickly as possible? Then we shall get it over.

GENERAL BONSOR:

I will do so, Lady Denison. (*clears his throat*) I have just received a letter from my friend, Colonel Nicholson, who commands the Munster Regiment. . . . Nicholson is an old friend of mine. I met him first at Poonah in '72 . . . Or was it '73?——

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Please do not bother about *dates*, General Bonsor! If you will *kindly* come to the *point*.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*rearing like an old war-horse under this affront*):

Certainly, Mrs. Eversleigh. . . . I wrote to Colonel Nicholson a week ago. And as I happened to hear Verreker say he had been in the Munsters, I mentioned that he was staying down here. . . . (*off again*) The Munsters are the old 43rd, you

know. The Fighting Forty-Third. I remember them in the old days when Tom Ferguson was in command. Ferguson and I——

LADY DENISON
(*pathetically*):

General, *would* you mind leaving that part out and telling us what Colonel Nicholson said about Mr. Verreker—if he said anything? It's really important.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*stiffly*):

I was about to do so—when you interrupted me, Lady Denison. I will do so now. . . . Colonel Nicholson says . . . Where the deuce does he say it? I'll give it you in his own words. (*fumbles for glasses.* LADY DENISON *is nearly wild with nervous impatience*) "I'm surprised to hear you've got young Verreker staying with you." (*looks up at* LADY DENISON) . . . He means with *you*, of course. (*returns to letter*) "I thought people fought rather shy of asking him. Small blame to 'em. He got into an ugly scrape while he was with us. Spent money belonging to the mess which he couldn't pay back. Might have gone to prison if the thing hadn't been hushed up. Had to send in his papers. Deuced ugly business altogether. Old Wakley, whom you remember at Dum Dum . . ." (*looking up again*) That's all.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*feeling the situation to be beyond her powers of comment*):

There, Mr. Hylton!

HYLTON
(*completely fogged*):

What is it, Mrs. Eversleigh? I'm really quite in the dark.

LADY DENISON:

Hush, Emily. You forget Mr. Hylton doesn't know yet. Nobody knows. (*to the* GENERAL, *with an earnestness absurdly out of proportion to the importance of the request*) General, would you mind leaving us with Mr. Hylton for a few minutes? My sister-in-law and I would like to consult him. We are *very* much obliged to you for letting us hear the letter—and would you please go at once?

GENERAL BONSOR:

Certainly.

(*The* GENERAL *goes out into the garden, much offended. The moment he is gone,* LADY DENISON *turns to* HYLTON *and pours out her lamentable tale.*)

LADY DENISON:

Mr. Hylton, what is to be done! You heard what General Bonsor said about Mr. Verreker just now? Mr. Verreker proposed to my daughter this morning and she accepted him.

HYLTON
(*horrified*):

Impossible!

LADY DENISON
(*dolefully*):

I wish it were. Margery came and told us about it just before luncheon. Of course, I was most indignant, and meant to tell her at once that I couldn't

think of allowing it, but the luncheon gong rang, and I've had no opportunity of speaking to her since. And it's all your fault, Mr. Hylton, as Emily says, for if it hadn't been for you I should never have asked Mr. Verreker to the house. I really knew nothing about him, and only did it out of kindness. And now the General tells us this!

HYLTON
(*much moved*):

Lady Denison, I can't say how distressed I am that this has occurred. I would have done anything to prevent it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I'm glad to find there are limits even to *your* toleration, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON
(*indignantly*):

Surely you never supposed I could *approve* of such a marriage?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I don't know. You champion Miss Triggs as a visitor—and Soames as a butler. Why not Mr. Verreker as a son-in-law?

HYLTON
(*distressed*):

You can't really think that, Mrs. Eversleigh. Knowing what I now know about Verreker how could I possibly think him a fit husband for a girl like Miss Denison!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*shrugging her shoulders*):

Well, well, you don't think so. That's the main thing. The question is, what is to be done?

LADY DENISON:

Of course, I shall forbid the engagement. I meant to do so before. But this puts it absolutely out of the question.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

And Mr. Hylton must use his influence with Margery. It's the least he can do.

HYLTON:

Anything I can do, Mrs. Eversleigh, you may be quite sure will be done.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

And let's hope she'll prove amenable for everybody's sake.

HYLTON
(*confidently*):

I've no fears on *that* score. When Miss Denison learns Verreker's true character she won't *wish* to marry him any longer. It would be impossible.

LADY DENISON
(*eagerly*):

Yes. Wouldn't it! It's not as if Margery were an *unprincipled* girl or a *bad* girl in any way. She's a very *good* girl. And a *religious* girl. And so she'll do what we tell her.

HYLTON
(*who has been pacing restlessly about, and is now by the open French window, turns round sharply*):

Here *is* Miss Denison, coming across the lawn. With Verreker.

LADY DENISON
(*feeling that this is the last straw*):

With Mr. Verreker? *How* unfortunate!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I don't see that it matters. He would have to be told what we think about him in any case. Why not now?

LADY DENISON
(*flustered*):

Very well. You must help me, Mr. Hylton. I'm so unaccustomed to having to manage Margery. She generally manages me.

(MARGERY *comes in from the terrace.* VERREKER *limps by her side, leaning a little on her arm.* MARGERY *is so full of* VERREKER'S *mishap that she is quite unconscious of the frigidity with which it is received by her audience.*)

MARGERY:

Is that you, mother? Poor Hugh has sprained his ankle. (*to* VERREKER) Be careful of that step. (*to her mother again*) Isn't it unfortunate? He slipped as we were going down the bank in the old spinney. I sent the others on, and brought him back by the short way across the lawn. (*to* VERREKER) Is it hurting much?

VERREKER :

Oh, no. It's nothing.

MARGERY :

Sit down here. (*drags up sofa*) And you must put your foot up and give it a complete rest. And if it's not better this evening we'll send for Dr. Jenkins. (*to* LADY DENISON) Wasn't it lucky we hadn't got farther from the house when it happened, mother. It's so bad to walk with a sprain.

VERREKER :

It's not a sprain really, Margery. Just a twist. That's all.

LADY DENISON
(*sternly*) :

Will you please not call my daughter Margery, Mr. Verreker.

MARGERY
(*astonished*) :

Not call me Margery? But, mother, we're *engaged!*

LADY DENISON :

You are *not* engaged, Margery. I cannot allow you to be engaged—at least, not to Mr. Verreker.

MARGERY
(*still more astonished*) :

Why not, mother?

LADY DENISON :

He knows quite well. And I think he's not behaved honorably in asking you to be engaged to him.

When you know his true character you will think so, too.

MARGERY:

Do you mean about his leaving the army?

LADY DENISON:

Yes.

MARGERY:

But I know about that.

LADY DENISON:

I don't think you do. Not *all* about it. You imagine, as I did, that he left the army because he had been foolish or got into debt or something. It was not that. Mr. Verreker left the army for a far more serious reason, which you know nothing about.

MARGERY:

Oh, yes I do, mother dear. Hugh told me all about it this morning.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

He *told* you!

MARGERY:

Yes. Before he asked me to marry him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Really!

LADY DENISON
(*bewildered*):

Margery! It's impossible. You would never have accepted him if he had told you. Mr. Verreker is not a fit person for any girl to marry. He is dishonest.

MARGERY

(laying hand instinctively on VERREKER'S *shoulder)*:

Mother!

LADY DENISON:

He spent money that didn't belong to him, money that had been entrusted to him.

MARGERY

(bravely):

I know. And when the time came he couldn't pay it back. He told me all that quite fully before he proposed to me. I thought it was very honorable of him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Honorable!

MARGERY:

Yes. Wasn't it honorable? To tell me I mean. He might have said nothing about it, or at least concealed the worst part hoping we should never find out. But he didn't. He told me everything. *(softly)* I think that was partly what made me say "yes."

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Margery! You must be out of your senses.

MARGERY:

Why? It's all over now, quite over and done with. What is past is past. (HYLTON *starts guiltily as he recognises this fatal phrase*) It happened four years ago. Surely we might forget it now?

LADY DENISON:

No, Margery. A thing like this can never be forgotten.

MARGERY:

I can't think that. One should always forgive wrong-doing, shouldn't one? And if one forgives why not forget?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Rubbish!

LADY DENISON:

Mr. Verreker, I must speak very seriously to my daughter about this. But there's no need for *you* to stay if you'd rather not. It would only be painful for you to hear. Would you rather leave us for a little?

VERREKER
(*calmly*):

Thank you, Lady Denison. I don't mind. (*settles himself more comfortably on his sofa. Pause*)

MARGERY
(*gently*):

Mother, aren't you all being rather hard on poor Hugh? We all do things we're ashamed of sometimes. Not quite the same things as this perhaps, but still *wrong* things. And if we're sorry, and try not to do them again, oughtn't that to be enough?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*snaps*):

No!

MARGERY
(*confidently*):

I'm sure Mr. Hylton thinks so.

HYLTON:

No, Miss Denison. In this matter I agree with Mrs. Eversleigh.

MARGERY:

Mr. Hylton!

HYLTON:

Your mother has told you what she wishes. I think you should obey her. It is your duty. (*pause*)

MARGERY
(*slowly*):

Of course, one should obey one's parents I know. . . . But there are other duties as well.

HYLTON
(*earnestly*):

Miss Denison, I've no right to speak to you about this, or to urge you in any way. And if you resent it I cannot complain. But the friendship I feel for you and your mother, the kindness you have always shown me, makes me risk that. Break off this engagement. Break it off, I beg of you. It is impossible that a girl like you should be happy with such a man as Mr. Verreker.

MARGERY
(*quite simply*):

But one shouldn't only think of *happiness* when one marries, should one?

HYLTON:

What do you mean?

MARGERY:

I mean there are other things. One would like to be happy, of course. But other things are more important. Helping people for instance.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*outraged*):

Are you going to marry Mr. Verreker because you want to *help* him?

MARGERY
(*eagerly*):

Of course. This morning when Mr. Hylton and I were talking about Hugh, he said there was so much that was good in him that only needed bringing out. That the eyes of his soul had not been opened yet. And he said that if he fell into good hands he would be all right, but if he fell into bad hands he might go on being careless and indifferent always. (*brightly*) So I thought if he married me I might prevent him from falling into bad hands.

HYLTON
(*much distressed*):

But when I was talking to you about Mr. Verreker this morning I never dreamed of your *marrying* him.

MARGERY:

Nor did I—then. But afterwards, when he asked me, I remembered. And so I said yes. I'm sure I did right. (*lays hand on* VERREKER'S)

HYLTON
(*at his wits' end*):

Miss Denison, this is terrible. I assure you what you are doing is not right but wrong. It is quite right that you should want to help Mr. Verreker, of course. But it is not right that you should marry him.

MARGERY:

But perhaps it is only by marrying Hugh that I *can* help him? You see, it's not easy for a girl to help a man however much she may wish to. They see so little of each other. And if you're really to influence people you must be *with* them, mustn't you? But when people are married they are always together, and then it's easy. So I'm sure I'm doing right in marrying Hugh. When a girl marries she should choose someone she can do good to, someone who needs her. Now I think perhaps Hugh *does* need me, for he's not always been a very good man so far. He's been lazy and rather selfish, and not very thoughtful for others. I'm going to cure him of *that!* Am I not, Hugh?

VERREKER
(*half smiling*):

If you can, Margery.

MARGERY
(*her face kindling*):

And that's really *worth* doing, isn't it! You see, if I married a *good* man—like you, Mr. Hylton—I couldn't help *him* at all. He'd be quite good already. But Hugh has done foolish things and wrong things, as we know. I can help him.

LADY DENISON:

Margery, I think you ought to listen to what Mr. Hylton says, and what I say, and do what we ask. It's very wrong of you to be so obstinate. You know we're thinking only of your good.

MARGERY:

Yes, but are you thinking of *Hugh's* good, mother?

LADY DENISON
(*plaintively*):

What *does* she mean?

MARGERY:

Would it help *him* if I broke it off?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*losing patience*):

Tck! Who ever heard of marrying a man to *help* him.

MARGERY:

Why not, Aunt Emily? (*feeling that her logic is irrefragable*) Mr. Hylton always says the only real way of helping people is to love them. And if one *loves* people of course one should *marry* them.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

Loves them! So that's it, is it! You're not marrying Mr. Verreker because you want to help him but because you've fallen in love with him. And you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

MARGERY :

Of course I love Hugh. What is there to be ashamed of in that?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*angrily*) :

Is there nothing to be ashamed of in wanting to marry a worthless man knowing him to be worthless? You have heard of men marrying worthless women, I suppose? Nobody thinks *they're* performing a moral duty and setting an example to their fellows. On the contrary, we think them weak or vicious. What you are doing is exactly what they do. Only they have the grace not to talk morality about it.

MARGERY
(*giving* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *up as* HYLTON *has done before her*) :

I don't expect *you* to understand, Aunt Emily. You never do like the way mother and I look at things, do you?

LADY DENISON
(*miserably*) :

Oh, don't bring *me* into this, please.

MARGERY :

Very well, mother. But I did think *you* would be on my side. And Mr. Hylton. (*laying her hand on* VERREKER'S *protectingly*) I love Hugh, and I want to help him. There's nothing strange in that is there? When one wants to help people one always does get to love them. That's the splendid thing about helping people. (*pause*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

Well, there's no use arguing with Margery while she's like this. She evidently has no moral sense whatever !

LADY DENISON :

Mr. Verreker, I appeal to *you*. You see what Margery is doing. Release her from this engagement. She is merely sacrificing herself from a fantastic sense of duty.

VERREKER
(*with dangerous politeness*) :

Surely not? If so, I have gravely misunderstood Mrs. Eversleigh. I thought it was Margery's fantastic sense of affection she objected to?

MARGERY :

Hugh, dear !

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*fiercely*) :

If you are going to insult me, Mr. Verreker——!

VERREKER :

I really beg your pardon. Perhaps I oughtn't to have said that. But some not very pleasant things have been said about *me*, haven't they?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

And with reason. A man of your antecedents has no right to propose to the daughter of the house in which he is staying. It is taking advantage of her inexperience. It is dishonorable.

VERREKER
(*calmly*):

Is that so? Then I'm probably rather lacking in the finer sense about these things. . . . But I suppose everyone is inclined to find excuses for his own misdeeds while remaining inflexibly severe towards his neighbours'. That's the foundation of all morality, isn't it, Hylton?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I should have thought *stealing* . .

VERREKER
(*as if he were considering the point*):

Yes. Stealing's an ugly word, isn't it? It even makes *me* uncomfortable. . . . And yet if you understood the whole circumstances you might take a more lenient view. But that, of course, would be a very bad thing for morality. So no doubt you'd rather not.

HYLTON:

Lady Denison, if Mr. Verreker has anything to tell you that will put a more favourable light on the General's story——

VERREKER:

The General's? So *he* told you?

LADY DENISON:

He heard it from Colonel Nicholson, who commands your old regiment.

VERREKER :

Yes, yes. I remember. He said he was writing to him. Poor General, so he really has been able to finish a story for once!

HYLTON :

I was going to say that it would be only fair to give Mr. Verreker every chance of defending himself.

(*There is a moment's pause, during which they wait for him to speak. Then he begins. His tone is quiet and unimpassioned, almost as if the case were not his own but someone else's, and his voice never falters. It is a statement of fact, not an appeal for pity, and therefore any display of emotion would be out of place. Perhaps he feels this. Anyhow, he makes none.*)

VERREKER :

Oh, I don't think it amounts to a defence. Merely a statement of the case from the person who knows most about it—the criminal, as Mrs. Eversleigh would say. I was an extravagant young fool. The regiment was an expensive one. I had a small allowance. I had lost money over cards—and other things—to richer men than I was—who, by the way, ought never to have played with me at all. Like an idiot, I thought I must pay my debts to *them* whatever happened. You know the nonsense that is talked about a debt of *honour*. (*with a bitter sneer on the word*) To do that I used money belonging to the mess which happened to be in my hands. Of course, I hoped to pay it back at once, or I shouldn't have done it. Equally, of course, I failed to do so. The horse that was simply bound to win lost, and I

played cards for a whole week and never held a trump. The usual thing. When things were pretty desperate I cabled to Uncle Montague—I was in India at the time—asking him to send me a hundred pounds by return. (*wearily*) Of course, I lied to him about the reason. Everybody does lie I suppose about that sort of reason. I said I owed it to tailors and people, I remember. Naturally, Uncle Mont didn't see the force of sending me a hundred pounds without haggling about it. Uncles always do haggle about money, I believe. At least, mine do. So Uncle Mont haggled, and like a young ass, instead of going straight to the Colonel or the money-lenders I faked the accounts. It was purely a temporary expedient. I knew the money would turn up in a week or two. It was merely a question of gaining time. But, as luck would have it, someone with an elementary knowledge of arithmetic happened to glance at the accounts. He spotted something was wrong and told the others, and instead of coming to me they went to the Colonel. The Colonel sent for me, and there was no end of a row. I tried to make him understand, but he couldn't. The stupidity of military men has been proverbial in all ages. I'm a bit of a fool myself, as you will have noticed. He stormed, and I was sulky. My borrowing the money intending to repay it he could *just* understand, but faking the accounts to conceal the fact was beyond him. Though it was the logical consequence of the other if the thing was to be kept dark. When the fat was in the fire Uncle Mont's cheque turned up. But by that time we'd all lost our tempers, the Colonel was prancing round about the *honour* of the Regiment (*another bitter sneer*), and I had to send in my papers.

HYLTON
(*half to himself*):

Poor fellow.

VERREKER:

Eh?

HYLTON:

Nothing.

MARGERY
(*triumphant*):

Mr. Hylton, I knew *you'd* understand. Thank you. (*pause*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*acidly*):

Well, Mr. Verreker, you've made out a very clever case, and you've put it very glibly. It must have taken you some time to prepare.

VERREKER

(*his tone if possible more cold and unimpassioned than before*):

Just four years, Mrs. Eversleigh. It happened four years ago, and I've not had much else to think of since. It was a confoundedly silly thing to do, as I said, and I've been wondering ever since how I came to do it. The result of my consideration is the story I've told you. I don't ask you to believe it, of course. But it's quite true.

HYLTON:

I believe it, Verreker. And I'm more sorry for you than I can say. If I've said anything that was harsh or unjustifiable please forgive me.

VERREKER :

Not at all, my dear fellow.

LADY DENISON :

It's all dreadfully sad, Mr. Verreker. I see that. But still, it doesn't alter the facts, does it? You have had to leave the army. Your reputation is ruined. And that makes you not a fit husband for Margery.

VERREKER :

I feel that, Lady Denison.

MARGERY :

Hugh!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

Then why did you propose to her?

VERREKER
(*shrugs*) :

A sudden impulse, I suppose. That's how most people propose, isn't it. If they stopped to think they'd think better of it, and then no one would ever marry at all. Which would perhaps be the wisest plan for all parties.

LADY DENISON :

Still, in your case you must admit there were special reasons?

VERREKER
(*dispassionately*) :

I don't know. How many men are fit husbands for the girls they marry? One in a hundred? One in a thousand? Girls are so ridiculously innocent.

And men are so ridiculously depraved. I'm not so very much worse than the others. Only I was stupider. And that ruined me. But it was four years ago. And I'm not likely to do it again. A man doesn't play the fool like that twice. One pays too dear for it. Considered as a husband I'm probably the better for the experience. I've learnt by it. (*pause*)

LADY DENISON
(*making a last appeal*):

Mr. Verreker, what you say is quite true. And I daresay you're not really worse than many men, though the world judges things like this more hardly than other things. But we are *in* the world, and we must accept its judgment as we cannot alter it. If you marry Margery *she* will have to suffer for what *you* have done. I don't think you want her to do that. Be generous and release her from her promise.

VERREKER
(*quite sincerely*):

My dear Lady Denison, I put myself entirely in Margery's hands. If she wishes to end our engagement she is absolutely free to do so. I assert no claim over her whatever. I agree with you that she would only be acting wisely to break it off, and I shan't dream of blaming her if she does so. But you mustn't ask *me* to break it off. A man can't do that. But if Margery wants her freedom she has only to speak.

HYLTON
(*enthusiastic*):

That's fine of you, Verreker. That's noble, on my soul. You really *are* a good fellow. I know what

it must cost you to give up a girl like Miss Denison. I honour you for it. (*holds out hand*)

VERREKER
(*taking it*):

Thanks, my dear chap. But you mustn't be too precipitate. I haven't given her up yet. Margery hasn't spoken.

LADY DENISON:

Margery, dear, you *will* break it off?

MARGERY
(*firmly*):

No, mother. As long as Hugh wants me I shall stand by him.

LADY DENISON
(*tearfully*):

Then you don't love your mother.

MARGERY
(*going to her impulsively, and putting her cheek against hers*):

Of course I love you, mother dear. But I love Hugh, too. (*pause*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*firing a parting shot*):

Well, I suppose there's no more to be said. If Margery is determined to ruin herself nobody can prevent her. *You*, of course, will continue to forbid the engagement, Muriel, but Margery is of age, and

if she chooses to defy you and marry this Mr. Verreker she can do so. But in that case I hope you will entirely refuse to make her any allowance, and, in fact, will disinherit her.

LADY DENISON:

What nonsense, Emily. Of course, Margery must have an allowance. What else is she to live on? Especially as, I suppose, Mr. Verreker has nothing?

VERREKER:

Next to nothing.

LADY DENISON:

Very well, then. Naturally I shall have to help them. And as for disinheriting her, that's impossible, even if it were just, as I've no other children. No, Margery must be provided for in any case. I'm sorry she is unwilling to do as I wish, and I think this engagement terribly unwise and unsuitable. But I suppose she's very fond of Hugh (*sighs*) just as I was very fond of Charlie before I married him. And so she must do as she likes.

MARGERY:

Darling mother! (*kisses her*) Now you're being like yourself again instead of being like Aunt Emily —which doesn't suit you one bit. I always knew you'd agree with me really—*and* Mr. Hylton (*with a bright glance at him*)—though you took rather longer than I expected. Hugh, give mother a kiss like a dutiful son-in-law, and say you think her the best woman in the world.

VERREKER
(*drily*) :

I think I'll spare poor Lady Denison *that*. She's had a great deal to put up with during the past hour.

MARGERY
(*remorsefully*) :

Poor mother! I suppose she has.

VERREKER :

I hope, however, later on she'll get more reconciled to things. She can't really dislike me as much as she thinks, otherwise she wouldn't have asked me here.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*with a bitter smile*) :

I'm afraid I really must disabuse you of *that* idea, Mr. Verreker. My sister-in-law has curious views of hospitality. She doesn't ask people to her house because she likes them or thinks them pleasant acquaintances, but because they are disagreeable or disreputable, or haven't anywhere else to go. It's a new form of philanthropy. Mr. Hylton invented it. (VERREKER *bursts into a shout of delighted laughter*) You seem amused.

VERREKER :

I am. (*laughs again*) How delicious! So *that's* why I was invited! Because I was down on my luck and wasn't asked to many houses! And I thought it was because of my delightful society.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*venomously*) :

You were certainly strangely mistaken.

VERREKER
(*much amused*):

So it seems. And *that* explains why all these other people are here, I suppose? I thought they were rather a damaged lot. Old Bonsor, Miss Triggs, Firket, that appalling Mrs. Horrocks, Hylton, who's an excellent chap but quite mad. (*mischievously*) And you, too, I dare say, Mrs. Eversleigh?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I, sir! Certainly not! *I* am here because I am Lady Denison's sister-in-law.

VERREKER
(*easily*):

That's no reason. Lots of people hate their sisters-in-law. I know I simply loathe my brothers.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

I am glad to think that Lady Denison is unlike you in that as in every respect.

LADY DENISON
(*soothing her*):

Of course, Emily. I asked you because I like to have you here. And Mr. Hylton, too. I must invite the people I like occasionally.

VERREKER:

I see. Well, Lady Denison, I think it's a splendid idea of yours, far more amusing than the ordinary way of inviting people. And the more dreadful they are the more amusing it must be. Margery and I must certainly take to it when *we* have a house.

LADY DENISON :

I don't see anything *amusing* in it, Mr. Verreker. In fact, it's often extremely unpleasant, and leads to most regrettable complications.

VERREKER

(*genially*) :

Such as *my* getting engaged to Margery?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH

(*snaps*) :

That among other things.

VERREKER

(*to whom the finer shades of "beginning one's charity at home" have scarcely yet revealed themselves*) :

Do none of them *know?*

LADY DENISON :

No.

VERREKER :

Why not? They'd be awfully amused. (*the voice of the* GENERAL *is heard on the terrace humming a cheerful stave.* VERREKER *looks round at the sound, just in time to see him approaching the French window on the left of the fireplace. A smile of reckless mischief lights up his face*) By Jove, here's the General. I *must* tell *him.*

LADY DENISON

(*despairing entreaty*) :

Please! Please!

VERREKER

(*laughing gaily*):

Yes, I *must*. I owe him one for telling you all that about me. *You* owe him one, too. He's given you a most uncomfortable afternoon.

(*The* GENERAL *enters by the window on the left, unconscious of his doom.*)

GENERAL BONSOR

(*quite amiable, but feeling that these modern habits of unpunctuality must not be allowed to go unremarked*):

Isn't it tea time, Lady Denison? I think so.

VERREKER

(*in high good-humour*):

Long past. I say, General, why have you been telling tales about me to Lady Denison?

GENERAL BONSOR

(*turning on him fiercely, all his feathers up, like an angry turkey cock*):

If it comes to my knowledge, sir, that a man who is staying in a lady's house with me is not a person whom *other* people wish to meet, I make it a rule to inform my hostess of the fact.

VERREKER

(*heartily*):

And a very good rule, too. Only Lady Denison doesn't ask people to her house whom *other* people wish to meet. It's against her principles.

LADY DENISON
(*protesting*):

Mr. Verreker!

GENERAL BONSOR.
(*gobbling with indignation*):

Upon my word, sir. . . . !

(*But* VERREKER *declines to be interrupted, either by the* GENERAL'S *anger or* LADY DENISON'S *anguish, and goes on relentlessly. The others listen in horrified fascination. Everyone is too much absorbed to notice the return of* MRS. HORROCKS *and* MISS TRIGGS, *who select this unlucky moment to enter by the French window on the right. They listen spellbound.*)

VERREKER
(*enjoying himself immensely*):

Lady Denison selects her visitors on philanthropic grounds—because they're disagreeable or disreputable or merely boring. It's a form of self-denial with her. That's why she asked you. That's why she asked me. That's why she asked all of us.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*stunned*):

What!

MRS. HORROCKS
(*defiant*):

What! ! !

VERREKER
(*swinging round as if he were shot at the sound of* MRS. HORROCKS'S *raucous voice. To himself*):
Good Heavens! Mrs. Horrocks!

MRS. HORROCKS
(*sternly*):

Yes, sir, Mrs. Horrocks. Miss Triggs and I returned from our walk just in time to hear your extraordinary statement. (*bleat from* MISS TRIGGS) May I ask what truth, if any, it contains?

VERREKER:

Really, Mrs. Horrocks, I'm very sorry you should have heard what I said——

MRS. HORROCKS
(*cutting him short*):

Is it true, sir? (VERREKER *makes hopeless gesture, but says nothing*) Lady Denison, perhaps *you* will inform me?

GENERAL BONSOR
(*more in sorrow than in anger*):

Why was I invited here, Lady Denison?

MISS TRIGGS
(*bleating again*):

And *I?*

LADY DENISON
(*completely flustered*):

I never meant you to know. I never meant Mr. Verreker to know. It's very unfortunate. Please accept my apologies all of you. I'm most distressed this should have happened.

MRS. HORROCKS:

Then it *is* true!

MISS TRIGGS:

Really!

LADY DENISON
(*meekly*):

I don't think Mr. Verreker need have told the General. It was most inconsiderate of him. But I hope you won't hold *me* responsible.

MISS TRIGGS
(*with tearful dignity*):

Will you kindly order the carriage to take me to the station, Lady Denison? I shall leave by the six o'clock train.

MRS. HORROCKS
(*haughtily*):

Of course, you will not expect *me* to remain.

GENERAL BONSOR
(*in hollow accents*):

Nor me! Boring!

LADY DENISON
(*much distressed*):

Oh, *need* you all go like that? After all, there's nothing so very dreadful in what you've heard. It was Mr. Hylton's idea.

MISS TRIGGS:

That dissenting person! I always *felt* he was an impostor. He tried to make me believe he was a clergyman, I remember.

LADY DENISON:

He meant it kindly. We all meant it kindly.

MRS. HORROCKS

(*drawing herself up to her full height*):

Lady Denison, if you cannot understand how insulting this is to *me* I cannot make you do so. But I *should* have thought, considering my birth and connections, I might have claimed a somewhat different treatment. The carriage, please, for the six o'clock train. (*sweeps out majestically to pack*)

MISS TRIGGS

(*equally unappeased*):

And will you please send some tea to my room. I shall not come down again before I leave. (*follows* MRS. HORROCKS)

GENERAL BONSOR

(*too broken with the world's ingratitude to protest further*):

Boring! (*follows* MISS TRIGGS, *shaking his poor old head*)

(*There is a pause while we realise that one of the most tragic things in life is to be a bore—and to know it.* MRS. EVERSLEIGH, *however, not being cursed with the gift of imaginative sympathy, wastes no pity on the* GENERAL. *Instead of this she turns to her sister, and, metaphorically speaking, knocks her out of the ring.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH:

This, Muriel, is what comes of beginning one's Charity at Home!

(LADY DENISON *has no reply, as the worm is too crushed to turn—and the curtain falls.*)

ACT IV.

SCENE :—*The dining-room at Priors Ashton. A week has passed since Act III., and the time is after dinner. The party is sadly reduced in numbers, for* MRS. HORROCKS, MISS TRIGGS, *and the* GENERAL *no longer grace the board with their presence. But* HYLTON *and* VERREKER *and* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *remain, and they, and* LADY DENISON *and her daughter, are sitting over their dessert, shepherded by* WILLIAM, *who is in sole charge for the present, the abandoned* SOAMES *having taken his departure. The room is lighted by electric lights on the walls, but there are also shaded candles in silver candlesticks on the table. When the curtain rises* WILLIAM *is handing fruit.*

WILLIAM

(*to* MRS. EVERSLEIGH) :

Grapes, madam?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH

(*taking some*) :

What fine grapes you have this year, Muriel.

MARGERY :

Aren't they? I took some to old Biddy Porter to-day. She's been ill.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

Who is old Biddy Porter?

MARGERY:

She lives at Ashton Parva in one of those little houses before you get to the church. And she's had influenza, so I thought it would be nice to take her some grapes. She was so pleased.

VERREKER
(*grimly*):

The gardener wasn't.

MARGERY:

No. Poor Thomson. He's so funny about the fruit. He seems to think we grow it entirely for ourselves. He's quite angry when I give any of it away. He doesn't even like my sending any to the cottage hospital.

LADY DENISON
(*anxiously*):

You will be careful with Thomson, won't you, Margery? He's so easily offended. I remember last year when you took all the early peaches to the Workhouse Infirmary just before we were giving some dinner parties he nearly gave warning. And I don't want to lose him. He's such an excellent gardener.

(WILLIAM, *having finished his duties, goes out.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*as soon as he has closed the door*):

The new butler hasn't come yet?

LADY DENISON:

No. We expect him to-morrow. I do hope he'll be a success. He has the highest references.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*sweetly*):

That must be very distressing to Mr. Hylton.

MARGERY:

Aunt Emily, you're not to scratch Mr. Hylton. He's been working at proofs all day and now he wants a rest.

VERREKER:

Lucky chap!

MARGERY:

What do you mean?

VERREKER:

To have *you* prescribing *rest* for him. You don't prescribe much rest for *me!*

LADY DENISON:

Has Margery been working you very hard, Hugh?

MARGERY:

Of course not, mother. Hugh's only talking nonsense.

VERREKER:

Am I! Just you listen. This morning I left some soup with Mrs. Green while Margery was taking Biddy Porter her grapes. She stopped the carriage at Mrs. Green's and dropped me there. It was nearly half an hour before she came back for me, and I had to hear the history of every disease from which the old lady had ever suffered and to look at her bad leg.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*scandalised*):

Really, Mr. Verreker!

VERREKER
(*yielding the point with cheerful alacrity*):

Arm, then. I know it was some part of her poor old body, though I couldn't recognise it. It was quite disgusting. I should have gone away, only Mrs. Green lives four miles from here, and I hate walking when its hot. However, the carriage came back at last, and then we drove on to the church, which Margery is decorating for some reason or other. I think because the harvest has failed. There I sat in a pew and made a wreath of mangel-wurzels to adorn the font.

MARGERY:

Not *mangel-wurzels*.

VERREKER:

Well, some kind of vegetable. We got back to lunch at last—late, of course. The wreath took so long. And in the afternoon—after a brief interval of repose—I wrote letters on behalf of a certain Mary Gamage who wants to get into an orphanage at Basingstoke—which seems an odd taste. I wrote twenty-five of them.

MARGERY:

Only after you'd been coaxed for a whole quarter of an hour. You were quite cross about it, and said you weren't a galley slave.

VERREKER :

Well, I was wrong.

MARGERY :

You were very disagreeable.

VERREKER
(*equably*) :

I know. I hoped we were going to quarrel. But you wouldn't. That's the worst of Margery. She never will quarrel.

HYLTON :

It's a good fault.

VERREKER :

Is it! However, I wrote twenty-five letters on behalf of Mary Gamage, as I said. And I've got seventy-five still to do. They were to ask subscribers to the orphanage for their votes. I gather some five hundred other people are busily engaged in writing the same number of letters on behalf of *their* orphans, and the subscribers, in common politeness, will have to write to the whole five hundred of us to say they have given their votes to the 501st. They can only vote once. The mere expenditure in postage stamps would suffice to endow another orphanage, not to speak of the waste of my time and their's. Moreover, I'm given to understand that this ritual is gone through every time the orphanage has a vacancy, and that there are more than a hundred orphanages similarly conducted in this distracted country. Who ever heard of such tomfoolery!

MARGERY :

It *is* troublesome, of course. But I don't see how else you could settle whom to let in. There are so many orphans.

VERREKER
(*briskly*) :

You could put the names in a hat, shake it, and take the one that fell out first.

LADY DENISON :

But would people subscribe to orphanages if they didn't get a vote?

VERREKER :

What on earth do they want votes for?

LADY DENISON :

In order that *their* orphans may get in instead of the others.

VERREKER :

Another illusion gone! I used to think charitable people gave their money because they were genuinely anxious to do good. I now find on the highest authority that they do it to keep out each other's orphans. Margery, I won't write another letter.

MARGERY
(*protesting*) :

Oh, Hugh, how horrid of you. If you don't *I* shall have to do them, and you said you would.

VERREKER
(*resigned*) :

Very well, I suppose I must as I said so. But my faith in charity is shattered. Nothing survives a closer acquaintance. Not even orphanages.

MARGERY
(*laughing*) :

How absurd you are, Hugh. You know you only talk like that because you think it will shock us. And it doesn't shock us one bit. We only think it silly.

VERREKER :

As you please, dear. But if that's the only way in which orphans can be kept alive I think you'd better drown them—and I've been an orphan myself.

LADY DENISON :

Do you mind talking about something else for a moment, Hugh? I think I hear William with the coffee, and he mightn't like it.

(WILLIAM *comes in and hands coffee, and departs again. While he is doing so* HYLTON *obligingly comes to the rescue with a new subject.*)

HYLTON :

Did you get as far as Croome this afternoon, Mrs. Eversleigh?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

Yes. Poor Lady Seathwaite is still in bed. But the doctor says she may be able to come down on Monday.

VERREKER :

What's the matter with Lady Seathwaite? (MRS. EVERSLEIGH *ignores him*)

LADY DENISON :

She has a bad attack of gout. She has it every autumn.

VERREKER :

I see. (*tersely*) Over-eats herself.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH
(*sharply*) :

Mr. Verreker, will you kindly remember that Lady Seathwaite is a friend of mine? And that I do not care to hear her insulted?

VERREKER
(*blandly*) :

I'd no intention of insulting her, Mrs. Eversleigh. It was only a suggestion to account for her indisposition.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

A most uncalled-for suggestion.

VERREKER
(*with exasperating amiability*) :

Very well. I withdraw it. I daresay she eats too little, and suffers from poverty of the blood. Margery shall drive me over to-morrow afternoon, and we'll ask her which it is.

MARGERY :

Hugh, Hugh, you're not to laugh at Aunt Emily. She doesn't like it. And we can't possibly go over

to-morrow afternoon because you're coming with me to tea at the Vicarage.

VERREKER :

Let's skip the tea.

MARGERY :

Certainly not. The Willises would be dreadfully hurt if we didn't go. And its so unkind to disappoint people.

(*The electric light suddenly goes out, leaving only the candles on the table alight.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

Good Heavens! What's that?

LADY DENISON
(*calmly*) :

Only the electric light, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

Only the electric light!

LADY DENISON :

It does happen sometimes. You see, Basset, who looks after the dynamo, isn't really an electrician. He was a footman.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

Then why does he look after the dynamo?

LADY DENISON :

Well, he was out of a place——

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

Muriel !

LADY DENISON
(*worried*) :

What's the matter *now*, Emily? Nothing else has happened, has it? . . . (*going on with her story placidly*) He was out of a place, as I said. He had been second footman at the Fox-Wilkinsons', at Abbots Ashton. But I'm afraid he sometimes took more to drink than was good for him. At least, he was found one day after luncheon in the dining-room quite intoxicated. So they had to send him away. When Margery heard of it she wanted to have him here—under Soames. But Soames didn't seem to like the idea. He was quite indignant about it, in fact. So as the electric light was being put in just then, Margery said that Basset could be taught to look after the engine. But he's not very skilful as yet, so the light sometimes goes out for hours at a time. I hope it isn't going to to-night. (*the light comes on again. Cheerfully*) That's better! (*depressed*) Now it's gone again. (*This as the light goes out afresh. A moment later it recovers, then has a series of spasms, finally settles to work again.* LADY DENISON *heaves a sigh of relief*) That's right!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH :

I thought you had given up engaging your servants on altruistic principles, Muriel?

LADY DENISON
(*quite simply*) :

So I have. But I couldn't send Basset *away*, could I? I don't think he could get another place.

Besides, he's really wonderfully improved. He hardly ever takes too much now. Shall we go? (*rises*)

(LADY DENISON, MRS. EVERSLEIGH, *and* MARGERY *go out,* HYLTON *holding open the door for them.* VERREKER *strolls to the fireplace and leans against the mantelpiece lazily, stretching himself.* HYLTON *returns to his seat.*)

VERREKER
(*laughing*):

Lady Denison really is the most absurd person in the world.

HYLTON:

Is she?

VERREKER:

Yes. But good people always are more or less absurd, aren't they?

HYLTON
(*smiling*):

The children of this world *are* wiser than the children of light certainly.

VERREKER:

Exactly. And she'll never learn wisdom now, poor lady. She's listened to *you* too long. She'll never get the poison out of her system.

HYLTON:

She dismissed Soames.

VERREKER:

But keeps Basset. You've won after all. Cigar? (*brings silver box from mantelpiece*)

HYLTON :

Thanks.

VERREKER
(*re-seating himself*) :

Poor Mrs. Eversleigh! How she loathes me! She'll never forgive me for having proposed to Margery.

HYLTON :

It doesn't matter. You've Lady Denison on your side.

VERREKER :

Thanks to *you*.

HYLTON
(*lightly*) :

I don't think *I'd* much to do with it.

VERREKER :

I know better. If it hadn't been for you, Lady Denison would be still unreconciled. I've no illusions on that point.

HYLTON :

Miss Denison would have made your peace for you.

VERREKER :

Yes. Margery has been a brick all through. She always would be. But you backed her up. I wonder why. (*pause*) Why was it?

HYLTON
(*hesitates*) :

Perhaps I felt I owed you some amends for the way I behaved when I first heard of your engagement.

VERREKER
(*raising his eyebrows*):

I don't know. Your attitude was a perfectly reasonable one. It *was* a most ridiculous engagement for Margery. *Is*, in fact.

HYLTON
(*cheerfully*):

Oh, no.

VERREKER:

Oh, yes. I am a young man with a discreditable past and no future. Margery will have a good deal of money one day. Considered as a match for her its preposterous.

HYLTON
(*shrugs*):

I wasn't thinking of money.

VERREKER:

You never are, my dear fellow.

HYLTON
(*laughing*):

Besides, you won't be able to squander Miss Denison's money even if you want to. It'll all be tied up strictly in trust.

VERREKER:

Yes. I shall be like a dog with a biscuit perpetually on his nose, and nobody ever saying "Paid for."

HYLTON
(*laughing again*):

Something like that.

VERREKER :

However, I didn't propose to Margery for her money, so I don't know that that matters.

HYLTON :

Of course not. You proposed to her because you loved her. Because you couldn't help seeing how good and unselfish and noble she is. (VERREKER *raises his eyebrows again*) No one could help loving Miss Denison. She has all sweet and lovable qualities. She is the most wonderfully good woman I've ever known. (*and the face of the altruist glows with enthusiasm*)

VERREKER :

Yes. (*reflectively*) It's a great pity.

HYLTON
(*astonished*) :

What do you mean?

VERREKER :

People really ought to have some redeeming vices, don't you think? But Margery's quite impeccable, poor dear. I remember I spoke to her about it before I ever thought of proposing to her.

HYLTON
(*deciding that this must be a joke*) :

Scoffer!

VERREKER :

Not at all. . . . Margery's simply riddled with philanthropy and unselfishness, and the Devil knows what. *I* call it morbid. I don't believe she

ever thinks of herself at all. I've never known anyone like her before. I don't believe there *is* anyone like her.

HYLTON
(*serious again*):

Miss Denison has a curiously perfect character.

VERREKER
(*ruefully*):

That's what worries me.

HYLTON:

Tck!

VERREKER:

It's all very well for you, Hylton. You've not got to live up to it. And if you had I daresay you wouldn't mind. You're a bit of a saint yourself. But for a healthy, easy-going mortal like me it's rather alarming.

HYLTON
(*rallying him*):

You'll get used to it.

VERREKER:

You think so?

HYLTON:

Yes—with Miss Denison's help. Why, she's helped you already more than you realise. You're a different man from what you were a week ago.

VERREKER
(*peevishly*):

I know. That's what's so annoying. Fancy *me* distributing soup to old ladies and soliciting votes for a blighted orphan! It's simply disgusting.

HYLTON

(*quite sure this is a joke*):

Nonsense, my dear fellow. You like it really, you know.

VERREKER:

I beg your pardon! My whole soul—I think that's what you call it?—revolts against it. But I *do* it. That's the miracle. And I did think the age of miracles was past!

HYLTON:

The age of miracles will never pass while there are men and women like Miss Denison in the world!
(*The utter sincerity with which* HYLTON *says this makes it impossible to laugh at him, even good-naturedly, as* VERREKER *would like to do.* HYLTON, *with the glow in his face and the look of the mystic in his eyes, is not a man one can laugh at, while his absolute unconsciousness, his total lack of anything like pose or insincerity, makes* VERREKER *feel that he has never liked him or admired him so much before. It may be madness, but it is a Divine madness. There is silence between them for a moment while* VERREKER *looks at his companion curiously. Then a slow smile comes into his face, and he speaks quietly.*)

VERREKER:

You're a queer chap, Hylton.

HYLTON

(*returning to ordinary life with a start*):

Why?

VERREKER
(*thinking better of it*):

Nothing.

HYLTON
(*with utter conviction*):

Yes. Faith can move mountains, now as always. And Miss Denison has faith, faith in goodness and in truth and in self-surrender. She'll convert you yet.

VERREKER
(*firmly*):

No!

HYLTON:

She *will*. You laugh at altruism now. In a year you'll be an altruist yourself. And it's your marriage that will have done it.

VERREKER
(*a light dawning on him*):

So *that's* why you approve of this absurd marriage.

HYLTON
(*nods*):

It's to save a soul.

VERREKER:

More philanthropy!

HYLTON
(*accepting the scoff good-humouredly*):

More philanthropy. This marriage is going to be the making of you. It will help you to find your self. Your true self.

VERREKER
(*sardonically*):

I should have thought I'd managed *that*.

HYLTON
(*all the optimist coming out in him*):

You're wrong. Your real self is not the healthy, easy-going person you talk of. It's the strong, self-restrained, self-denying man, Miss Denison will put in his place. (*enthusiastic*) There's nothing the love of a really good woman can't do for a man. It brings out all that is fine in his nature, and drives out all that is base. That is what your marriage will do for you!

VERREKER:

The deuce it will!

HYLTON
(*collapsing under this cold douche—as I'm afraid* VERREKER *meant him to do*):

But I must apologise for talking to you like this. I'm afraid it bores you.

VERREKER
(*a little penitent*):

Not a bit. I like it.

HYLTON
(*shaking his head*):

No.

VERREKER:

Yes, I do. In fact, I'm rather interested in the Psychology of Benevolence just now. Please go on.

HYLTON
(*laughing*):

Not to-night. Besides, we ought to be moving. (*rises*)

VERREKER:

Perhaps so. (*rises. He seems to reflect for a moment*) Will Margery *always* be as good as she is now, do you suppose?

HYLTON
(*unhesitatingly*):

I'll stake my life on it.

VERREKER
(*eyebrows raised*):

No chance of her outgrowing it?

HYLTON
(*firmly*):

None!

VERREKER:

Ah! I hoped she might. . . . Well, Hylton, I'm glad to have had this chat with you. You really are a good chap, you know. And if you can go on being friends with a sweep like me I shall be grateful.

HYLTON
(*smiling*):

I think I shall manage that.

VERREKER
(*half to himself*):

I'm not so sure.

(*They stroll towards the door; but before they have*

had time to reach it, MARGERY *enters, and at once begins to scold them, in high good-humour.*)

MARGERY:

You *rude* people! You've stayed *much* too long over your cigars. How is poor William to clear away?

VERREKER:

Can't he do that to-morrow morning?

MARGERY:

That shows how much *you* know about managing a household!

HYLTON:

We were just coming, Miss Denison.

MARGERY:

You're too late now. Mother's gone to bed. She's tired. And Aunt Emily's going, too. She's cross. And so am I. I'm offended.

VERREKER:

Stay five minutes. Sit down here.

MARGERY:

No!

VERREKER:

Yes. (*puts her gently in his own chair. He sits on an arm of armchair*) And give me a cigarette.

MARGERY:

Ought you to smoke any more?

VERREKER :

No. But I will. (*does so*)

MARGERY
(*cheerfully*) :

I've been getting some more letters done for Mary Gamage.

VERREKER :

That infernal orphan !

MARGERY :

Sh ! So you won't have *quite* seventy-five more to write.

VERREKER :

Thank heaven !

MARGERY
(*gaily, quite blind to the enormity of the suggestion from* VERREKER'S *point of view*) :

I think you might get up and do a few before breakfast to-morrow, just to show your gratitude? I'll help. I *should* like to get them all off before we go to the Vicarage.

VERREKER :

Margery, I refuse !

MARGERY
(*unruffled*) :

Very well. But you're very foolish. Before breakfast is the nicest part of the day at this time of year. You lazy people who don't come down till half-past nine don't know what you're missing.

VERREKER :

We'll take your word for it.

MARGERY
(*ignoring this sarcasm*) :

Will you come to tea at the Mackworths' on Friday, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON :

Certainly, if you like.

MARGERY :

You must come, too, Hugh.

VERREKER :

All right. Who are the Mackworths?

MARGERY
(*seemingly unconscious of the appalling character of the programme*) :

They live in a *funny* little house in the village. Old Mrs. Mackworth's very deaf, and *he* can't hear much either, so they don't have many visitors. It's so tiring talking to deaf people, isn't it? One has to shout so. But I always try to go at least once when we're down here. It cheers them up, I think. I'm glad you're both coming. (VERREKER *takes cigarette from between his lips and groans*) And now I really must go to bed. Good-night.

VERREKER
(*detaining her*) :

No. Stop a bit longer.

MARGERY
(*shaking her head with mock firmness*):

Can't.

VERREKER:

Yes, you can. Just till I've finished this. Besides, I've something rather particular to say to you.

HYLTON
(*rising*):

In that case perhaps I'd better retire to the library?

VERREKER:

Do. I'll be with you in two minutes.
(HYLTON *goes out, and there is a brief silence.* VERREKER *is plunged in thought, and his brow puckers.*)

MARGERY
(*merrily*):

Well? What is this *important* thing you've got to say to me?

VERREKER:

I'll tell you. (*pause. Looks at her fixedly for a moment or two*) By Jove, you *are* pretty, Margery.

MARGERY:

I don't think *that's* very important.

VERREKER:

Then you're very much mistaken! . . . However, that's not what I had to say. (*pause. He pulls himself together with an effort, and speaks gravely but kindly*) Margery, I want you to break off our engagement.

MARGERY
(*unable to believe her ears*):

Hugh!

VERREKER
(*gently*):

My dear, I don't like saying it, and I hope you don't like hearing it—though I don't want it to hurt you too much either. But I've been thinking things over, and I'm quite sure we two oughtn't to marry.

MARGERY:

Why not?

VERREKER:

For lots of reasons. I'm not good enough for you, Margery, and that's the long and short of it.

MARGERY:

What nonsense!

VERREKER:

It's not nonsense at all, unfortunately. It's a painful truth. Mrs. Eversleigh was right. I ought never to have proposed to you.

MARGERY
(*sadly*):

Do you mean you don't love me, Hugh, as you thought you did?

VERREKER:

No. I don't mean that. I love you as much as ever, more perhaps now that I'm going to lose you. But on every ground except love I'm quite unfit to marry you.

MARGERY
(*pleading*):

Surely love is enough?

VERREKER
(*almost impatient at what he considers the colossal ineptitude of that remark*):

No. It isn't. Margery, let's face facts, and not shirk them as everyone else seems to do. Marriage isn't a thing to be romantic about. It *lasts* too long.

MARGERY:

Hugh!

VERREKER:

My dear, it may last forty years. Surely that's long enough in all conscience! (*recovering from his momentary irritability*) Very well, then. As one marries for a long time one should choose carefully, reasonably. One mustn't be carried away by passion. Passion's a great thing in marriage, but common-sense is a greater. Now what sort of a life should we make of it together if we married, you and I? Why, my dear, we've not an idea or a taste in common. Everything you say makes me laugh, and almost everything I think would make you blush. It's simply absurd for a girl like you to marry a fellow like me. Let's say so frankly and end it.

MARGERY
(*puzzled*):

But, Hugh, you *liked* being engaged to me at first, didn't you? Why have you changed your mind? Have *I* done anything?

VERREKER :

No, dear. You've been absolutely sweet and good, as you always would be. Only you're *too* good, and that's all about it.

MARGERY

rather hurt. She is convinced that this must be one of HUGH'S *jokes, and she naturally thinks it rather heartless of him to joke at such a moment*) :

Now you're laughing at me.

VERREKER

(*absolutely serious*) :

I never was further from laughter in my life. I say you're too good and I mean it. You look on life as a moral discipline. I look on it as a means to enjoyment. You think only of doing what you imagine to be right. I think only of getting what I know to be pleasant. (*with an ironical smile*) They call it incompatibility of temper in the Law Courts, I believe.

MARGERY

(*puzzled again*) :

I don't understand you, Hugh. Sometimes you seem quite serious, and then you say something horrid that spoils it all.

VERREKER :

I know, dear. You don't understand me, and it's just as well you don't. But that makes the idea of marriage between us rather ridiculous, doesn't it? The sort of man you ought to marry is Hylton—who,

by the way, is over head and ears in love with you. You should have heard his eulogies over you ten minutes ago. He was simply lyrical! Yes, you must marry Hylton. Will you?

MARGERY
(*half laughing, half crying*):

I'm still engaged to you, dear, so far.

VERREKER
(*briskly*):

I'll release you. And you really will be happy with Hylton. He's a first-rate chap. Promise me that when you've stopped mourning for me—say in about a fortnight's time—you'll seriously consider the possibilities of Hylton.

MARGERY
(*more hurt and more puzzled than ever*):

Are you really heartless, Hugh, or do you only pretend to be?

VERREKER
(*shrugging his shoulders*):

I don't know. Ask Hylton.

MARGERY
(*sadly*):

I thought we'd been so happy together since we'd been engaged.

VERREKER
(*heartily*):

So we have, dear—in spite of Mary Gamage. But then, we've only been engaged a week. And I feel *years* older for it!

MARGERY

(*asking the question in complete good faith*):

Seriously, Hugh?

VERREKER:

I'm *serious* enough. (*but he uses the word in a different sense*) You think everybody can be as self-denying as you are, Margery. You're wrong. Some people are born self-denying just as other people are born self-indulgent.

MARGERY

(*encouragingly*):

But you may change.

VERREKER

(*another moment of impatience*):

Men don't *change*, Margery. They *repent*, but they don't *reform*. (*the moment passes*) And so our engagement has been a mistake. It's my fault, I know. I ought to have thought of all this before I asked you to marry me. But you were so pretty and—well, I didn't. Will you forgive me?

MARGERY:

(*gravely and a little sadly*):

Of course I forgive you, Hugh. It's not your fault. You thought you loved me and you asked me to marry you. Now you find you don't, and you ask me to release you. You've been quite kind and straightforward. There's nothing to forgive.

VERREKER

(*with the nearest approach to emotion that he has allowed himself since the beginning of this scene*):

My dear, my dear, it's not that. I loved you before. I love you still. I believe I shall always love you—so long as I don't marry you. But married we should be miserable.

MARGERY
(*gently*):

I don't think *I* should be miserable.

VERREKER
(*briskly*):

I know *I* should. At first I should be as unselfish as the deuce just to oblige *you*. But after a bit I shouldn't be able to stand it, and I should strike. And then you'd be disappointed, and I should be disagreeable, and our marriage would become a tragedy. (*sincerely*) I don't want that to happen. I'd rather you found me out now while you're still fond of me than later when you had come to hate me.

MARGERY:

I should never *hate* you, Hugh.

VERREKER:

You couldn't help yourself, my dear. An unhappy marriage would demoralise even you. They say some forms of suffering ennoble people, and putting up with what one doesn't like is supposed to be good for the character—though I'm sure I don't know why. But an unhappy marriage never ennobled man or woman. It makes them peevish and unreasonable. It sours their tempers and ruins their digestions. *My* parents didn't get on together,

and I know. If the parsons cared two straws about morality instead of thinking only of their dogmas, they'd make divorcing one's wife as easy as dismissing one's cook. Easier.

MARGERY:

Hugh!

VERREKER:

Thev would! When married people don't hit it off, they jar. There's no middle course. And when the jarring has gone on for a certain length of time it gets past bearing. Human nerves won't stand it. Nothing will enable them to stand it. Not love, nor religion, nor all the seven *deadly* virtues. Socrates was a good man, but he made his wife pretty unhappy.

MARGERY

(*the tears are dangerously near her eyes*):

And you think I should make you unhappy?

VERREKER

(*cheerfully*):

I'm sure of it. So let's behave accordingly. (*more gently. The danger of tears has been averted*) Come, Margery, say you release me and get it over.

MARGERY

(*slowly*):

Very well. If you really wish it . . . you're sure you *do* wish it?

VERREKER :

Quite. Thanks, dear. You've behaved like a trump, as you always do. And I think I must kiss you good-bye. (*does so tenderly*) Don't say anything to the others till after I've left. I rather dread Mrs. Eversleigh's unconcealed satisfaction. I shall go to-morrow.

MARGERY :

Very well. If you'd rather not.

VERREKER
(*looking at her half ironically*) :

I'm afraid you think I've been a selfish beast about this?

MARGERY
(*wistfully*) :

A little selfish, perhaps.

VERREKER :

You're wrong. For the first, and I hope the last, time in my life I've done an unselfish action. I'm a pauper, you know, and you're something of an heiress. And I've given you up without compensation. (*dispassionately*) It's rather to my credit.

MARGERY
(*sadly*) :

Only because you wouldn't be happy.

VERREKER :

No. Because *you* wouldn't be happy. *I* should have been all right. But I had to put it the other way or you wouldn't have let me go. *I* should have given up philanthropy after the first six weeks and had no end of a good time. But *you'd* have been

wretched. We've done the right thing. (*rising*) And you won't forget about Hylton, will you? Shall we go in? (*he goes and opens the door for her. They go out as the curtain falls*)

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